MIGRATION STORIES:
EXPERIENCES OF RECENTLY ARRIVED LATINO YOUTH IN THE
CANADIAN PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM

Master of Arts 2010
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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to investigate, through narrative analysis, the arrival stories of Latino/a immigrants into the Canadian school system, and to examine how their migration experience influences their identification process. The data to be analysed was collected during interviews conducted for the Proyecto Latin@ project; a research that looks into the perspectives of Latino/a youth towards school desertion and their experiences as Latino/a students in Canada. Interviews analysed included students with recent arrival dates into Canada ( < 3 years at the time of interviews). Their narratives displayed a shift in ideology as students internalized the dominant discourse and present a conundrum for students struggling in school. This analysis attempts to add to the growing body of knowledge on the specific difficulties faced by the Latino/a youth upon their arrival into Canada, as well as how their identities develop and shift during this process.
Acknowledgements

There are a few people without whom this thesis would have remained an idea living inside my head alone. I must first and foremost thank my amazing supervisor, Ruben Gaztambide-Fernández, for his unwavering support, encouragement, and constant feedback. For pushing me to be better- del alma, gracias. To Diane Gerin-Lajoie, who put up with my incessant questions and gave me some much needed perspective after I was tired of reading the same lines over and over again. Merci beaucoup, Madame! Finally, to my family for always telling me to take the risk and being there to catch me. In particular to my loving husband, for putting up with a crazy work schedule and the existential crisis inevitable in all creative process; te amo.
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Chapter 1: An Introduction

Everyday social interactions, institutional procedures, and cultural and political practices serve to communicate. The normalized and accepted social protocols that we engage in on a daily basis transmit messages to others about us; about how we perceive and want to be perceived by others. At international levels, discursive practices such as immigration policies influence not only how immigrants will be perceived by those in their host country, but will also shape how immigrants construct their own sense of self. In the case of Latino/as, self-identification as Latino/a affects the way they are perceived as well as how they perceive themselves in Canada. Examination into how Latino/a youths’ identification process is molded by their immigration to Toronto can shed light on how these social constructions occur.

In addition, investigating the lived experiences of immigrants and other minorities can allow us to better understand the difficulties faced by these groups across Canada, hopefully informing the development of policies that seek to improve the living conditions of new immigrants (Lopez-Damian, 2008). Toronto provides an ideal site in which to engage in this work, as it receives 50% of the immigrant inflow to Canada (Rekai, 2002).

The analysis presented in thesis is based primarily on the arrival stories of recent Latino/a immigrants in the Toronto public school system. The data is taken from Proyecto Latin®, a research project carried out in 2009 (Gastambide-Fernández et al, 2010). While this research focused on the perspectives of Latino/a students on school engagement and school desertion, it also touched on students’ ethnic identifications and experiences as Latino/as in schools. The data collected sheds light into the processes of
identification constructed in the context of school. Investigating the process through which Latino/a immigrant youth negotiate their identification sheds light on the way in which these youth adapt to their new life in Canada. The analysis presented here can inform the development of intervention strategies targeted at decreasing the high rate of school abandonment among Latinos/as in Toronto schools.

Because many of the participants in Proyecto Latin@ were recent arrivals into Canada, and due to the diversity of their backgrounds and personal stories, the interviews carried out for that project provided rich data. The analysis I carried out focused specifically on narratives of school life in Canada, using students’ stories to look at the process through which they have developed their identifications as Latino/a students and how this is reflected in their attitudes towards school at the time of the interviews.

Immigration

Historically, immigration has played a major role in the development of nations throughout the American continent, as is the case of Canada. Even today, immigration is one of the primary motors that drive population growth in this country (Lopez-Damian, 2008). During a ten year period from 1991-2001, the proportion of immigrant to Canadian-born population growth increased by 2% on average across Canada. The biggest gains were in British Columbia (4%) and Ontario (3%), where immigrants make up more than a quarter of the population (Statistics Canada, 2008). Therefore, there is interest in the experiences of newly arrived immigrants and how they adapt to their new home. Much of the research however, examines the lived experiences of adults, and their transition into the labour market in their newly adopted country
There is not as much literature on the experiences of children and youth (Ko & Perreira, 2010).

The majority of immigrants into Canada settle in urban centres, 75% just in Toronto, Vancouver, and Montreal (Krahn et al., 2005). Toronto is one of the most popular settlement destinations, with almost half (42%) of its population claiming status as a visible minority (Statistics Canada, 2008). Latino/as have a distinct history of migration, tracing back to around the 1950’s and becoming much more voluminous in recent decades (Mata, 1988).

Latino/a immigration to Canada can be organized into 4 different waves according to demographics of national origin, ethnicity and occupational backgrounds (Mata, 1988). In this sense, the waves are: the Lead wave (1950’s-1972), the Andean wave (1971-1975), the Coup wave (1973-1979) and the Central American wave (since 1981). These 4 waves help to understand the history of immigration from Latin American countries to Canada. These waves were caused not only by socio-political events in Latin America, but also by the Canadian immigration policy at various times. The first two waves are mainly the result of economic and labour opportunities, while the last two are mostly due to refugee phenomena.

According to Mata (1988), immigration during the 1950s and 60s was not particularly voluminous. However, this coincided with Ontario’s industrial expansion and increased need for labour, which lured more migrants from Latin America. The need for skilled employees attracted many white-collar workers from some of the more developed economies at the time, such as Argentina, Uruguay, Mexico, Brazil, and Venezuela (Mata, 1988). During this time, most of the immigrants were Latinos/as of European
descent, (i.e. Italo-Argentinian) coming from the south cone, including Argentina, Uruguay, and some from Brazil (Mata, 1988).

This began changing with the Andean wave, aptly named to reflect the high proportion of Ecuadorians and Colombians who immigrated during this period, along with Chileans. This amnesty allowed those with temporary visitor visas to apply for permanent residency upon arrival to Canada. This produced an unprecedented flow of 50,000 immigrants in a period of two years. While all Latino/a immigrants benefited from this legislation, Ecuadorians and Colombians made up 30% of the Latino/a immigrants during that time. After a bloody military coup in late 1973, a large number of working class Chileans were seeking refuge at foreign embassies fearing for their lives and those of their families. In early 1974, the first refugees arrived in Canada under the Special Chilean Movement refugee program (Mata, 1988).

After 1983, Salvadoreans totaled almost half (42.5%) of the Latino/a immigration; thus the term Central American wave. This wave is a product of a series of social and political events that created unrest in Central America; the Sandinista victory in Nicaragua (1979), the escalation of civil war in El Salvador (1980-1992) as well as in Guatemala (1960-1996). Most of these political refugees were urban poor or rural middle class, therefore they arrived in Canada with lower levels of education and skills. However, Mata (1988) characterizes this group with a high degree of political awareness, organizational capabilities, and social cohesion (perhaps due to their displacement and politically unstable countries), all of which aided in their adaptation to Canada.

Mexican Americans, mainland Puerto Ricans, Americans of Cuban descent, Americans of South American origin, as well as the recent immigrants from troubled
Central American nations are distinct populations. They differ in demography and history, face different issues in schools, and should, therefore, be understood as such (Suárez-Orozco, 1987). While Suarez-Orozco’s research focuses on a different Latino/a population in the US, this caveat is also important for research with Latino/as in Canada, as they also arrive here from different countries and under different circumstances. The variety in their origins means they will also have different experiences of their migration to Canada.

Once they have arrived in Canada, immigrant families that are introduced into the public school system face challenges of their own. For the Latino/a adolescents who attend public schools in Toronto, this process of adaptation seems to be extremely challenging. A recent report published by the Toronto District School Board (2008) estimated the dropout rate for students self-identified as “Spanish speakers” at just over 40% (Brown & Sinay, 2008). In terms of academic achievement, Latino/a students did not fare much better than other students, their academic scores ranking second-lowest among all students (Brown & Sinay, 2008).

In response to this alarming figure, Proyecto Latin@ was born. Led by Rubén Gaztambide-Fernández, a team of researchers conducted focus groups interviews and individual interviews with 30 students in six public high schools in the Toronto area. These interviews aimed to explore Latino/a youths’ attitudes towards school abandonment and factors leading to academic disengagement. Because of the loose narrative structure, the interview with the students also generated data on issues of ethnicity, and cultural and ethnic identification, and the role of adults and peers in youths’ lives (Gaztambide-Fernández et al, 2010).
Proyecto Latin@ found that while the main issue facing Latino/a immigrant youth was language and cultural barriers, they also faced pressure in different areas of their lives. Students often faced discrimination from peers in and outside of school, along with lowered expectations from school administrators and teachers. Due to changes in their family’s finances since the migration, students sometimes had to juggle working and studying, which made it hard for them to commit to staying in school. The results were presented to the Toronto District School Board along with recommendations taken from the students’ suggestions (Gaztambide-Fernández et al, 2010). The present work seeks to build on what Proyecto Latin@ began, by analyzing the data collected in a different manner to uncover how Latino/a identifications are constructed and how these could be related to school abandonment in this population. Is there something about the process through which these youth negotiate their identification in school that facilitates or hinders their school abandonment?

Adults in School

One of the central findings of Proyecto Latin@ through interviews with Latino/a students was the importance of adult relationships to academic engagement. Faced with harmful stereotypes, discrimination, and prejudices, the “negative social mirror” (Green, Rhodes, Heitler Hirsch, Suárez-Orozco, Camic, 2007) in which Latino/a immigrant youth see themselves is especially detrimental to school engagement. The manner in which a teacher or other school staff interacts with a student is critical in forming a student’s concept as a learner and in their future school success. Indeed, the subject of a class might not be as significant in these interactions as establishing a sense of rapport between
the student and the teacher. Building trust is cited as one of the main strategies teachers should use to educate minority students (Ogbu & Simons, 1998).

As Reyes (2009) found, students need access to “key interactions” in learning situations to stimulate their sense of agency and concept of self as learners with the potential to be successful students. The concept of a “successful student” refers not only to a student’s academic achievement, but to her/his ability to learn and effectively navigate the bureaucracies in today’s school system and knowing how to “play the game” (Urrieta, 2005; as cited in Reyes, 2009), even if they choose not to. This is specially necessary for students of marginalized communities to learn. Effective role models for these students will often be individuals who have acculturated to Canada, attained a higher education, and achieved economic success (Ogbu & Simons, 1998).

Teachers will sometimes subject students to different expectations based on their academic placement (Cavazos, 2009). With the over-representation of some minorities in lower-track classes and their unequal access to advanced placement courses (Solorzano & Ornelas, 2004), the meaning that is being conveyed to these students is that there is no expectation for them to go on to higher education or succeed academically. These expectations can be especially damaging to students as they are internalized.

On the other hand, positive adult relationships have been found to have significantly beneficial effects for students (Green et al, 2007; Reyes, 2009; Solorzano & Ornelas, 2004). Having the support of teachers and other adults at school can provide students with information on cultural practices, and minimize the exposure to discrimination and discomfort with other cultures (Green et al., 2007). In addition, teacher support is negatively correlated with more discrete measures of academic
“failure”, such as absences, detentions, and suspensions (Hudley, Daoud, Polanco, Wright-Castro, & Hershberg, 2003). Supportive relationships with adults at school can also act as “positive social mirrors” for Latino/a youth, intensifying their ethnic/cultural identification and boosting self-esteem (Suárez-Orozco, 1987). Interactions with adults who students can identify with also improves self-esteem and enhance students’ belief in their own abilities (Reyes, 2009).

Among Latino/a immigrants, the broader context of reception into their new communities shapes the societal factors that influence their adaptation and parenting (González, 2001; Matute-Bianchi, 1986; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). Thus, differences in the context of reception lead to the development of unique ecological niches that mold the values, beliefs, and practices of parents and modify the success of these practices in helping adolescents transition into adulthood, what Portes and Zhou (1993) refer to as ‘segmented assimilation (Dumka, Roosa, & Jackson, 1997; Gaztambide-Fernández & Guerrero, 2010; Hill, Bush, & Roosa, 2003; Reese, 2002; Vega, 1990).

There has been research investigating the achievement gap between White and Latino/a students, but these have been mostly in the US (Fry, 2003; Gándara, 1999, 2002). These studies have also focused on comparing achievement scores between the two groups and attempting to explain them in terms of ethnicity. The construct of ethnicity and culture, however, is not exactly monolithic. To use simplistically as an explanation for lack of academic achievement or performance in standardised tests is simply inadequate. As Carter and Warikoo (2009) observe, it is “dangerous to attribute schooling behaviours to a singular racial, ethnic, or cultural identity” (p. 385). Therefore, any investigation of the differing school behaviours of Latino/a students must take into
account the myriad roles that adolescents find themselves immersed in on a daily basis. Using narrative analysis to examine these students’ stories will shed light on how these identities are constructed in the process of migration and how they are re-fashioned through interactions with others in the new country.

Although studies based in the US are helpful in contributing to the literature and constructing a framework in which to use group comparisons, the differences between the US Latino/a population and the Canadian Latino/a population mean that results are not easily extrapolated to the Canadian context. Ko and Perreira (2010) denounce not only the lack of research on Latino/a experiences in the specific Canadian context, but the dearth in these studies as well. In their essay, Gaztambide-Fernández and Guerrero (2010) also bring to point the lack of research in Latino/a immigration to Canada, and the need for a field of Canadian studies that focus on the particular context and experiences of Latino/as in Canada.

Latino/a populations in the US and Canada differ firstly in size. Immigrant Latino/a youth are the fastest growing sector of the U.S. youth population, increasing by 57% over the past decade. Of the 20% of children in the U.S. that are from immigrant families, 62% are Latino/a (Green et al, 2007). In California alone, 50% of immigrant school-aged children are Latino/a (Conchas, 2001). Meanwhile in Canada, Latin American immigrants account for only 6% of the visible minority population. This is a deceiving statistic, as it does not report immigration status and includes visible minorities of Canadian origin, but serves to point to the striking difference in size between Latino/a groups in the US and Canada. Although small in numbers, Latinos/as are posed to be the
fastest growing minority, with a 40% increase in people identifying as Latin American from 2001 to 2006 (Statistics Canada, 2008).

Latino/a populations in Canada and the US also differ in composition. While immigration from Latin America to the US is negatively correlated with geographical distance (Mata, 1985), the opposite is true for Canadian immigration. Latino/a immigration to the US is compromised mostly of countries located geographically close, such as Mexico, Cuba, and Dominican Republic. Therefore the ethnic makeup of Latinos/as in the US will differ from that of Latino/as in Canada. There is also an integral difference in the cultural and ethnic makeup of Latinos/as in the US. Although the majority of Latinos/as in the US identify as Mexican (Mata, 1988; US Census Bureau, 2007), the history of this immigration differs greatly from Latinos/as in Canada. Mexicans in the United States were absorbed into the US through a process of colonization, resulting in a US born minority more akin to African Americans than immigrants. This native minority did not willingly arrive to the US looking for a better future or escaping detrimental conditions “back home”, yet they are regarded as outsiders from the dominant culture nonetheless. This has resulted in the counter-culture of Chicanos (Reich, 1989). Chicanos in the US have established a strong, unifying term which is still somewhat indefinable. It is in this ambiguity that lays its strength, as it points to something that “we” share and “they” do not. Through political movement and community building, Chicanos became an entity different to Latinos, Mexican, or Anglos.

In addition, Latino/a groups in the US and Canada have different education levels. Latinos immigrating to Canada have on average attained higher educational levels than
those immigrating to the US (Jafee et al., 1980; as cited in Mata, 1988). This has implications for the type of employment they might seek once emigrated, although they might not necessarily obtain the type of jobs they seek in their newly adopted country. Their education level also influences the social economic status that they had in their country of origin; both of which affect their migration experience (Ko & Perreira, 2010).

A final difference between Latino/a groups in the US and Canada is a result of the different immigration policies between the two countries. Historically, the United States and Canada have both used immigration as a tool for building their nations. The US’s history with “Americanization” of immigrants and it’s policy for assimilation contrast with Canada’s “multiculturalism” policy. Although both hold an essentialist view of culture as a personal trait, Canada’s policy has purportedly emphasized a controlled preservation of immigrant’s cultures; as opposed to the United States’s more aggressive assimilation or “Americanization” policy (Gaztambide-Fernández & Guerrero, 2010).

More recently, both countries have revised their immigration policies in different ways. Canada has placed much more emphasis on attracting young, skilled immigrants (Rekai, 2002). Under this policy, immigrants are selected through a point system that favours individuals with training and experience in skilled occupations (preferably postsecondary education), proficiency in both official languages, and youth.

This contrasts with the United States’ continuing emphasis on family reunification. Approximately 64 percent of the legal immigrant flow each year consists of family-sponsored applicants. And, since September 11, 2001 “Prevention, not selection, remains the current focus of the US government’s immigration agenda” (Rekai, 2002; p. 6). This sends a strong message not only to immigrants, but also to the US-born
population of how immigrants are regarded. The idea that there is a danger in allowing immigrants in the country, and that there is something to be prevented, positions immigrants as foreign aliens whose constitution is somehow detrimental to the average US citizen. In this sense, these policies are discursive practices that position immigrants as a negative and threatening entity to citizens, and send a strong message on how they should be regarded and treated.

The present research will seek to add to the growing body of knowledge on Latino/a immigrants in Canada and in the more specific context of the public school system. This research will be divided into five chapters. This first chapter addressed the context, rationale, and purpose of the study. I will next provide a review of the key theoretical concepts that inform the present work. The following chapter will give an overview of the methodology used for the research, including the analytic framework used to look at the narratives. The fourth and fifth chapters will present the student narratives and how they were analysed. The final chapter will discuss the results, as well as address the limitations of the study and formulate possible future research directions.
Chapter 2: Theoretical Connotations

As immigrants first arrive in their host country, their cultural and ethnic identities can be reinforced due to the geographical distance to their country of origin, creating a new identity as they settle into their new home and subscribe to multiple cultural systems (Cabassa-Hess, 2004). In addition, they have access to different cultural resources as they are exposed to others’ assumptions about groups as well as their own assumptions. Length of residence in the host country could also be a factor in attitudes towards one’s own ethnic group as well as the majority group (Ichiyama, 1996), further complicating the matter. Identities are an essential way through which people engage with the world around them (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain 1998). The narratives produced by this group of adolescent students in the process of constructing and reconstructing their identities, could highlight how their identity construction is shaped by their new minority status and through their interactions in the school system. These identities in development are also means by which these adolescents mediate agency (Holland et al, 1998), an important accomplishment in the midst of the upheaval that is migration.

Ethnic identity is formed in part by the relations between the dominant culture and minority culture as it is identified by the dominant majority (Li, 1999). As the dominant group dictates what markers are ascribed to a specific group, these “ethnicities” are produced. It is through the “othering” by the dominant group as well as any cultural or linguistic elements that the minority group shares that these specific ethnic groups are created. For immigrants, this process can call into question their own identification as they face these markers that they had not encountered when being part of the majority group in their home country.
As this study refers to immigrants newly arrived to Canada, it is important to make the distinction between the situation of this minority group and others in Canada. Using Ogbu’s (1978) heuristic concept of voluntary vs. involuntary minorities is useful initially to situate this group. Voluntary minorities are characterised by: 1) a voluntary migration to the host country, in search of economic, religious, or political freedoms, and 2) they do not view their presence in the host country (in this case, Canada) as thrust upon them by the Canadian government or White Canadians (adapted from Ogbu & Simons, 1998). There are further categories of immigrants, such as refugees, whom might not necessarily be in Canada by their own choice, but who nevertheless share what Ogbu and Simons refer to as a “tourist attitude” towards their cultural or language differences, knowing that in order to emigrate they must learn the Canadian ways. This allows them to be more open to learning the “Canadian way” without fear of losing their home culture. The analysis of the data for Proyecto Latin@ suggests that recent Latino/a immigrants are quite open to the process of becoming Canadian (Gaztambide-Fernández et al., 2010).

They will, for example, see the process of learning English as adding another language, not replacing their native tongue- this makes a marked difference in terms of the attitude towards the majority group. The recent immigrants who participated in Proyecto Latin@, for example, saw English as a tool to navigate life in Canada, but not as a threat to their native tongue (Gaztambide-Fernández et al, 2010). According to Ogbu, the more recent the immigration, the more likely that individuals will exhibit the behaviours of the voluntary minority category. (Ogbu & Simons, 1998). Therefore, for Latinos/as who have recently immigrated into Canada will more likely demonstrate a
willingness to learn the Canadian way of life. Although this frame is useful for
differentiating the recently arrived immigrant group from other generations of immigrant
groups; it does not address the differing attitudes held by generations of immigrants. If
children migrate due to a decision made by their parents, they might not exhibit the same
behaviours as those outlined by Ogbu in reference to immigrants who settle in the host
country willingly and in hopes of a “brighter future”. Research conducted in the US with
regards to the generation of immigrant children whose academic achievement is equal or
better than their native-born counterparts has focused on "the ideologies of opportunity"
and "cultures of optimism" shared by immigrant parents (Suárez-Orozco, 2005). Looking
at the narratives produced by individuals in this study and how they experience their
migration could help to shed some light on the perspectives of immigrant children. They
process through which they negotiate their newly acquired status in relation to the
majority group, such as the imposition of a new language and ethnic markers.

Ethnicity

A major part of this investigation centers around ethnic identity and its
relationship to lived experience. There are several ways to look at ethnicity, as it is an
interdisciplinary construct spanning across different fields. While ethnic groups are often
described as homogenous, this is not the case, ethnic identity is a complex and
multilayered concept, with no clear and linear relationship to learning or self-esteem; as
what ethnic identity means differs from one individual to another and therefore plays
differently into each individual’s identification process (Phinney, 1991).
More importantly, even for members of a group who identify with the same ethnicity, this label is often heterogeneous; with more than one ethnic identity within one ethnic group (Li, 2001). The idea of a unifying “national culture” is problematic, as most modern nations consist of different cultural groups, and there are always issues of social class, gender and ethnic inequality (Hall, 2006). Therefore, not all immigrants who identify with the label “Latino/a” experience or interpret it in the same way. Listening to their individual stories can highlight some of the diversity found in this group, which is lost in the bigger scope of population studies.

In schools with such a diverse student population, it becomes even more important for teachers to understand this notion of ethnicity, and their own roles in the construction of these ethnicities. In particular, the importance of the differential power relations daily enacted in the school system. King (2004; as cited in Gerin-Lajoie, 2008) points to the importance of educating teachers in how the challenges of minority students can be related to a systemic process of exclusion as opposed to individual deficiencies.

Ethnicity is a social construction, constantly evolving and being shaped by interactions with other people, institutions and social practices. In Reich’s (2009) work with Chicano/as in the United States, she analysed their narratives in order to examine how they constructed the concept of Chicano/a through their interactions with non-Chicano/as and Anglos. The Chicano group presented a particularly interesting case as this group is a native minority of the US, as opposed to an immigrant minority. Therefore Chicano/as identification is not the same as a Latino/a identification; although there is an overlap in traditions, beliefs, and language (Reich, 2009). Reich found that often their idea of Chicano differed from one person to the other, and was dependent on several
things. The subjective identification with the term is what made someone Chicano/a, not a specific set of criteria. Therefore, Chicano/as used language, appearance, values, as well as food and music to differentiate themselves from others (most importantly from Anglos) and claim a specific identity as Chicano/a.

For example, when using language, Chicano/as talked about talking Spanish around other people they knew would not understand them to distance themselves from Anglos and claim a kinship with all other Spanish speakers (Reich, 1989). In addition, the use of Spanish names as well as manipulating the pronunciation of names was used as a symbol to claim ethnic identity. This worked for both claiming a Chicano/a identity (by pronouncing their names with a Spanish accent) as well as rejecting a Chicano/a identity by “Anglocising” their names. This had particular implications when dealing with non-Chicano/as, for example, when manipulating their name to sound more English for a job application, people would be criticized by other Chicano/as for denying their heritage in search of money- considered to be a particularly Anglo value.

The emphasis on moral superiority is mirrored in Lamont’s (1999) work with working class participants who used moral criteria to differentiate and elevate themselves above the “upper class” who socio-economically enjoyed a ‘higher’ status. Whether using work ethic, resiliency, or quality of life, workers situated themselves above the “upper class” who was only concerned with money (Lamont, 1999). This use of values to locate oneself on par or above the dominant group allows for people normally considered on the lower class to measure their self-worth by other means.
Discourse

As practices that shape all social interactions, discourse aids in the identification process by providing cues as to the status of groups in a system; how they are perceived by others and hence, how they perceive themselves. Epistemologically speaking, the word derives from the French word *discours*. During the 1960s however, its philosophical and theoretical meaning began to digress slightly; however it preserved the general meaning referring to conversation, “holding forth” a topic (Mills, 2004). Within specific disciplines, clear-cut definitions are elusive, referring to a range of things. But the original meaning of communication is still kept- above all, discourses communicate, whether directly or indirectly (Mills, 2004). This communicative purpose of discourse is the primary tenet that applies throughout all disciplines.

In addition, discourse also implies a non-language component, as Gee (1999) articulates in his distinction of “discourse” vs. “Discourse”. He explains “little d” discourse as the language used “on-site” in social interactions to enact a specific identity. It is this discourse that sociolinguists look at, the micro interaction. This is contrasted by the “big D” discourse, which does not only involve language but rather ways of being that can be used to identify a person as member of a particular group, the “macro” or big picture. Gee (1999) explains:

the different ways in which we humans integrate language with non-language “stuff,” such as different ways of thinking, acting, interacting, valuing, feeling, believing, and using symbols, tools and objects in the right places and the right times so as to enact and recognize different identities and activities, give the
material world certain meanings, distribute social goods in a certain way [...] and privilege certain symbol systems and ways of knowing above others. (p.13)

The vital aspect to Discourse, according to Gee (1999) is recognition. If the combination of language and non-language use is enough for one person to recognise another as a member of a particular group, then the Discourse is reinforced and perpetuated. This combination of symbols and props which are recognizable as part of a certain Discourse are then propagated and enacted by others as well. Gee (1999) argues that political and social issues can be conceived of as different Discourses, which interact or conflict, and for which humans are simply “carriers” (p. 18). In this sense, the conversation between “being Anglophone” Discourse and Discourse of “being Francophone” in Canada has existed for a long time, but people are usually not aware of this history, or how they affect the way we speak and act in the present. In the same manner, the conversation between the Discourse of “being a real American” and the Discourse of “being immigrant” have existed in the United States long before the recent debate about Mexican immigrants in that country (Gavrilos, 2010).

However, discourses can change and die all the time (Gee, 1999). One discourse can divide into two or more discourses, or plural discourses can meld into one. Influenced by evolving social and political contexts, media and cultural phenomena at the time. In turn, since discourses can affect other discourses, the change or death of one can trigger the change of another discourse. Moreover, as Gee points out, there an innumerable amount of discourses, and no clear cut boundaries between them.

It is impossible to talk about discourse without talking about Michel Foucault. The French philosopher talked about discourse extensively in his works, to the point of
having three meanings for discourse in his work alone. He referred to discourse in three ways: the general domain of all statements, an individualizable group of statements, and the regulated practice that result in certain statements (Mills, 2004). The general domain refers to discourse in a general more theoretical level, not alluding to a discourse in particular. In turn, a particular discourse is a group of statements that have some sort of coherence between them and are regulated in some way, such as a feminist discourse. Meanwhile, the social practices and structures that produce these groups of statements are also referred to as discourse.

These social practices are essential to the concept of discourse, as statements are formed within a social context, infused with power relations. Discourse is then both determined by and contributes to the social context and its continued existence. It is therefore impossible to separate the two. As MacDonnell (1986; as cited in Mills, 2004) states:

Dialogue is the primary condition of discourse, all speech and writing is social. Discourses differ with the kind of institution and social practices in which they take shape and with the positions of those who speak and those whom they address. (p. 1)

Discourses are therefore also influenced (and in turn influence) those involved in it: the speaker and the audience. As Foucault (1972) describes it, discourses are practices “that systematically form the objects of which they speak” (p. 49). In this manner, discourses are integral in structuring our sense of reality, how we perceive the world to be- and our sense of self and identity.
Foucault (1979) speaks to this structuring of reality through his notion of ‘truth’. In his words, a society actively produces:

the types of discourses it harbours and causes to function as true: the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true from false statements; the way in which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures which are valorised for obtaining truth, the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true. (p. 46)

In this sense, truth is constructed by societies, not pre-existent and objectively created outside of that specific society. Through the construction of what is true, a society also communicates how things can be true, and who is a credible authority to say what is true.

The importance of the speaker-listener context also speaks to the relevance of power relations to the notion of discourse (Foucault, 1979). Social practices that become accepted and normalized as truth will place a certain group (usually the speaker) in a specific position to other groups. The dominant discourse in a society (the “truth”) will also inform everyone in that society of the social rules by which to abide as well as who can dictate this.

This is where Gee’s notion of “recognition work” is relevant. In order for a Discourse to be accepted, it must be recognised as that particular Discourse. Gee (1999) defines this recognition work as something that people do everyday in social interactions, when they try to “recognize others for who they are and what they are doing” (p. 20). This recognition of a Discourse is what allows it to be perpetuated. They create each other, as a Discourse creates something to be recognized, and the recognition creates the
Discourse. The “masters of the dance” as Gee puts it, will dictate what Discourses will be recognized.

Foucault (1978) speaks about power and knowledge in a slightly different way, as he does not equate power with inequality, but as dispersed throughout social relations. Power both produces and restricts behaviour, depending on the relation. Therefore, both the dominant and the dominated have and exercise power. In his work he tries to shift from thinking about power as a means of oppression by the powerful to examine the way that power operates within relations between both people and institutions. He argues that even at their most stifling, oppressive measures are actually productive, engendering new forms of behaviour rather than simply closing down or censoring them; in contrast with the more traditional conception simply viewing power in a constraining and repressing way (Mills, 2004). He theorises that power is essentially linked to context, as opposed to a institution or structure which exists outside of complex social relations in a specific society. In addition, he conceptualizes power as inextricably linked to knowledge and refers to them usually in unison pouvoir/savoir in acknowledgement that all knowledge is “the result or effect of power struggles” (Mills, 2004).

Regarding the official discourse on the integration of minorities in the school system, Harper (1997) has discussed five ways that the notion of difference has been defined over time in Canadian schooling. The first response is characterized by an aggressive assimilation policy, which Harper dubs “suppressing difference.” The goal with these policies was to create uniformity in the Canadian population. New immigrants, First Nations, and francophones had to be “Canadianised” to conform to the vision of a “White, Christian, English speaking nation” (p.194). The second response, “insisting on
difference," focuses on separation and segregation. Differences are seen as natural and inevitable, and therefore a different education must be given to those who are different. Women, blacks, and people with disabilities were some groups which experienced segregation under policies and educational reforms embedded in this discourse.

In contrast to the previous two, the third response denies all differences and calls for equal treatment to all and became popular especially after WWII. This response is based on the ideologies of meritocracy and individuality. The notion of meritocracy suggests that success is ‘earned’ on the basis of individual ability, drive, and ambition. As such, identity is conceptualised as a unified essence that goes beyond race, gender or any other differences (Harper, 1997). Policy makers then try to compensate for inequalities by holding all students accountable to the same learning outcomes.

The fourth response is in someways a contradiction to the last one. Dubbed “inviting difference” by Harper (1997), this response is focused on celebrating diversity. The notions of multiculturalism and Canada’s cultural mosaic are central in this discourse. The educational policies associated with this response consisted of supplementing the curriculum with information about foods, festivals, and folklore from various cultures. The underlying assumption of these programs is that culture is a stable, uniform, and discrete object; therefore transmittable by anyone with or without intimate knowledge of said culture (Harper, 1997). Power relations and systemic marginalization are not acknowledged or critically examined by this approach.

This “foods and festivals approach” does not address equity issues, and provides a superficial way of including students in the majority culture, as opposed to assimilating them (Gerin-Lajoie, 2008). The fifth response takes this critical approach, and examines
when and how differences are produced and treated. It focuses on power relations and understanding them. The best known example of this type of inquiry is anti-racist education, which examines how policies and practices produce inequalities (race, gender, sex and class-based) (Dei & Johal, 2005).

Based on these critical inquiry ideals, researchers call for a more critical education in pre-service programs (Gerin-Lajoie, 2008; Knight, 2008). As Knight (2008) points out, white teachers must question their own role in the system of oppression in order to better understand how whiteness becomes normalized and experienced by non-whites. If whiteness is held as the standard to which all students are held, then non-white students do not measure up and this difference is perceived as a deficiency in the student, not the system. This understanding of inequity and diversity becomes critical when one thinks of the role of teachers in students’ construction of self. They transmit not only academic knowledge, but social, cultural and linguistic ones as well (Gerin-Lajoie, 2008).

Identity & Identification

The central issue under investigation in this thesis is identification and the process through which it is constructed, specifically in the context of Latino/a youth migrating to Canada. The study of identity is an extremely complex and wide field, straddling multiple disciplines and embodying differing concepts in each. An exhaustive review of the entire concept is well beyond the scope of one thesis, as whole books are written on all the different theories (e.g. Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain 1998; Reich, 1989). However, a review of how it will be conceptualised in this work will be given to help situate the study.
Identity can be conceptualised in certain fields such as static and more or less constant. It is developed through childhood through socializing practices, and authors such as Erickson (1968) contend that all humans go through a series of stages and follow a certain set path to develop identity. This essentialist approach to self proposes a permanent, durable self, and is the diametric opposite of the constructivist approach that is used in this study to conceptualize the self and identity. Although useful in other disciplines such as psychology, it generates a different set of questions and is studied in other ways than those used in this study.

Born from the 1920s Russian movement pioneered by Vygotsky and Bakhtin, the process of identification used in this work is much more sociocentric. Vygotsky and Bakhtin both put forth a conception of life as mediated by social interactions between social actors (Holland et al., 1998). According to Hall (2006), this process of identification is a constant evolution, mediated by how individuals position themselves and how they are positioned by others in social interactions. Because of the importance of context and social relations, discourse is also essential to identification. Identities do not arise in a person already formed, but are rather “unfinished and in process” (Holland et al., 1998). Most importantly, they happen in social practice (Holland et al., 1998); meaning they are constructed jointly by social actors and transform the moment as they are created by it. As these social interactions become normalised and widely socially accepted they become part of the dominant discourse that feeds into the identification process of all individuals in the society.

Symbolic boundaries are a central process in the construction of the self. As Lamont and Molnar (2002) explain, “identities are a result of a process of self definition
and the construction of symbolic boundaries and assignments of collective identities by others” (p. 175). The other plays a big role as the self in constructing identities, as it is not only the perception of oneself but also the perception that the other has of the self that shapes identities. So as a person uses symbolic boundaries to differentiate themselves from an other, it is the reinforcement of a collective identity ascribed by the other that is also necessary to form that identity.

These symbolic boundaries are lines drawn to define and include some, and exclude others who do not fit the definition. Historically, Lamont and Molnar (2002) contend that societies contained competition for resources by discriminating against other groups; using certain characteristics to make their group superior to others. In doing so, they developed specific qualities that would grant entry into the group. These “markers” would also dictate how interactions with those outside the group should be handled.

Through the use of symbolic boundaries groups develop a “typification system”, assumptions about similarities and differences between groups that define who they are (Lamont & Molnar, 2002). So that identities are constructed by comparing and contrasting others to the self, and defining markers that differentiate us from them.

These boundaries become social practices as they are normalized and accepted by more and more people in a society (Lamont, 2002). An understanding of these boundaries has an impact on social positions and access to societal resources (Lamont & Molnar, 2002). In this sense, it is necessary to understand the “qualifications” for gaining entry into a group and tapping into its resources. For example, in Canada knowing English and receiving a high school diploma are necessary to gain access into the labour market.
The constructivist approach to identification emphasizes this social positioning that occurs whenever people interact. Any behaviour is a “sign of and a claim about” one’s social position (Holland et al., 1998, p. 8). People will behave differently depending on the social actors present in any given situation, and the position that social boundaries dictates. Communication between people then discloses not only the message but also an affirmation about who the social actors are, their relationship and status relative to one another.

The process of identification, described by Hall (2006) as that in which individuals project themselves into their cultural identities, has become less consistent, with no clear boundaries in “modern societies.” These modern societies are those characterised by rapid and constant change. For any one individual, there are many identities that are salient in some situations and shift and change in response to cultural systems that surround us (Hall 1990). For immigrant adolescents in Toronto, these identifications are questioned and re-fashioned in reaction to the new cultural system in which they are embedded.

While in school, these adolescents are exposed to peer culture and socialised through their peers. According to Shin, Daly, and Vera (2007), students who had a high ethnic identity and positive peer norms reported a higher level of school engagement than those with negative peer norms. In addition, for these students their strong ethnic identity helped to minimize the effect of negative peer norms- acting as a buffer to internalizing negative school attitudes from their peers. Whether this effect was due to an overall more confident self-esteem, or values stemming from their specific ethnic identity was not explicitly explored in the study. However, the relationship between identification with an
ethnic label and self-esteem, higher school engagement and academic success is relevant to understand among ethnic minority adolescents.

The symbolic interactionist theory focuses on the everyday interactions that an individual has with her/his environment and how these interactions carry with them a meaning that contributes to the individual’s self-concept and builds cues that help them navigate the world around them. These micro-interactions between an individual and those around them in a school setting have the power to shape how students will view themselves (Cummings, 2000). The manner in which a teacher or other school staff interacts with a student is critical in forming a student’s concept as a learner and in their future school success. Indeed, the subject of a class might not be as significant in these interactions as establishing a sense of rapport between the student and the teacher. Building trust is cited as one of the main strategies teachers should use to educate minority students (Ogbu & Simons, 1998).

This work then seeks to investigate how discourse and symbolic boundaries are expressed in participants’ narratives. More specifically, how these aid in the process of identification in recent Latino/a immigrants and how this process is involved in the students regaining a sense of agency lost during the upheaval of migration.
Chapter 3: Methodology

As noted in the first chapter, this thesis is based on the analysis of data collected for a larger research project that examined the schooling experiences of Spanish-speaking students in Toronto. Beginning in the Winter of 2009, Proyecto Latin@ sought to examine the schooling experiences of Latino/a students in Canadians public schools. This research involved both group and/or individual interviews with 60 students at six public high schools in Toronto. The individual interviews lasted anywhere from 20-40 minutes. At the beginning of each interview confidentiality and anonymity was assured to the participants (See Appendix A & B for interview protocol). Participants were given a brief overview of what the interview was about and what the project was investigating.

For this thesis, I selected 11 participants using demographic data collected through a survey also administered during Proyecto Latin@ (See Appendix C & D for survey). I looked through the transcripts of participants who had been in Canada for three years or less at the time of the interviews. After reading through these interviews, the first 10 participants were selected based on the richness of their narratives and the eloquence with which they expressed themselves. An 11th participant was chosen whose narrative provided an interesting contrast to the other 10 as he had been in Canada for more than three years (five years at the time of the interview). His narrative yields a different perspective on the migration experience. The following table provides the names (pseudonyms) and basic information of the participants selected for my thesis. For those participants who neglected to fill in some information on the survey, the information was extracted from their interviews.
These 11 students participated in interviews, and some of them also participated in focus groups with other peers. For the purpose of this study, only their interview transcripts were used, as the narrative data was more continuous and provided much richer data than the focus groups.

For this thesis, I have chosen to use the method of narrative analysis to look at the students’ stories. In narrative analysis, the object of investigation is the story told; focusing on how participants choose to order their experiences to make sense of their reality. This method is particularly well suited for studies of subjectivity and process of identification, and useful for revealing particulars about an individual's social life; including racial oppression and other power relations (Reissman, 1993). This makes this method extremely appropriate for this study. Since the cultural context is so important for the creation of these narratives, characteristics taken from a short survey including date of

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**Table 1. Participant Information**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Patricia</th>
<th>Enrique</th>
<th>Adriana</th>
<th>Mario</th>
<th>Isaias</th>
<th>Paula</th>
<th>Leonardo</th>
<th>Marino</th>
<th>Lucas</th>
<th>Sandra</th>
<th>Alicia</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grade</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birth date</td>
<td>18/06/91</td>
<td>29/01/93</td>
<td>08/12/94</td>
<td>09/09/93</td>
<td>22/04/91</td>
<td>04/09/92</td>
<td>08/08/93</td>
<td>04/08/92</td>
<td>16/08/91</td>
<td>01/07/93</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birth place</td>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>El Salvador</td>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>Uruguay</td>
<td>Argentina</td>
<td>Cuba</td>
<td>Colombia</td>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>Panama</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arrival date (dd/mm/yy)</td>
<td>11/12/08</td>
<td>18/08/05</td>
<td>01/02/07</td>
<td>01/08/08</td>
<td>04/11/03</td>
<td>01/11/07</td>
<td>26/12/07</td>
<td>27/02/09</td>
<td>26/02/09</td>
<td>17/09/08</td>
<td>05/05/08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time in Canada at time of Interviews</td>
<td>4 months</td>
<td>3 years, 8 months</td>
<td>2 years, 3 months</td>
<td>9 months</td>
<td>5 years, 5 months</td>
<td>1 year, 6 months</td>
<td>1 years, 4 months</td>
<td>2 months</td>
<td>2 months</td>
<td>7 months</td>
<td>11 months</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
immigration, age and gender will be taken into account when selecting the participants. Having diversity in the group of participants will be beneficial for the study, as more diverse narratives were produced. Having information on their background and their migration is useful when conducting the analysis of the narratives, to reveal any patterns between similar or different backgrounds.

In order to set the context in which narrative analysis was developed, I will give a brief overview of the larger context within which it is set. This is the field of qualitative research methods and the area of critical discourse analysis.

**Qualitative Research Methods**

A concrete and clear-cut definition of qualitative research eludes the field, partly due to its extensive use across various disciplines and fields (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). As St. Pierre and Roulston (2006) question:

If the category [of] qualitative inquiry is so unstable that it might be both art and science, and if, indeed, it stretches across disciplinary discourses and practices as well as across cultural boundaries and national divides, is it possible to adequately fix the category? (p. 1)

Instead, a set of interconnected methods and ideas surround the concept. These ideas include the nature of reality, the role of the researcher, the role of the participant, and the methods employed in research. As Nelson (1992; as cited in Denzin and Lincoln, 2005) states, the context produce the questions that are asked, which in turn dictate which research practices will be chosen to answer them.
The roots of qualitative research can be traced back to the documentation of colonies by empires, and 19th century anthropology. In the 1920s with the work of the Chicago School, the field of qualitative research has evolved as notions of the “other”, the researcher, and the process of studying individuals and societies were called into question and became more complex. Originating in the fields of anthropology and sociology, qualitative methods provided a tool for studying exotic and “primitive tribes”; images of the white, “civilized” researcher visiting observing the foreign, uncultured people of far away lands come to mind. However qualitative research expanded to be used in other social sciences such as education, political science, and communications among others (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

After the 1950s however, the field began to move away from the positivist, evidence-based scientific model towards a more humanistic approach to the study of people’s lived experiences. As Denzin and Lincoln (2005) state, this may have been due to the subordinate status that quantitative researchers designated to qualitative inquiry, using it as exploratory or descriptive only in so far as to support their hard-lined quantitative “evidence”. This marked a rise in post-positivist arguments and opened the doors for new interpretative paradigms to be developed.

Post-positivist theorists criticised positivism on two main arguments; that there is no absolute separation of the knower and the known, and that there is no single, shared, true reality (Philips & Burbules, 2000). Therefore qualitative research is not concerned with a reality that is “out there,” independent of the researcher and the participants. There is no objective reality outside of the interpretations made by those who experience it as well as those who attempt to study it (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).Through the methods and
techniques researchers use to make these interpretations visible, they too change the world they study. They transform the experience into field notes, interviews, journal entries, and all that they can do is study the interpretations made by the participants and analyse what, how, and why those interpretations are made and the meanings that the participants bring to those interpretations.

Once this view of an objective, true reality was discarded, researchers struggled with how their participation influenced the very phenomena they were attempting to study. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) refer to this dilemma within the research field as the crisis of representation, first emerging in the mid 1980s. During this time, writing in qualitative research became more reflexive, with the researcher situating herself in the context she was studying, not ignoring the personal life stories that they brought with them to their research, and how these influence their own interpretations as they move through their research and analysis.

Therefore, it is argued that researchers cannot capture lived experiences objectively, as these experiences are created even as they are written by the researcher (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). They constitute the reality as they study it; their interactions with participants creating new interpretations that would not have occurred had they not been present. Post-structuralist theories continued to reject the idea of one universal truth, and an objective knowledge that could be accessed by the researcher (MacLure, 2003). Instead, truths are partially constituted by those who experience them. Knowledge is subjective, depending on the context, the time, and what the knowledge is needed for.

Denzin and Lincoln (2005) posit an interesting depiction of the researcher as bricoleur, a person adept at using their available resources to merge or quilt together
different materials— in this case participants’ truths, knowledge, their own fieldwork, paradigms, ideologies, or critical viewpoints. Understanding that research is a process molded by personal histories, race, class, gender, ethnicity as well as other people surrounding the process, and knowing that disciplines are no longer separately bound into different boxes neatly packaged but that an investigation can cut across fields of knowledge, the researcher stitches together the parts to make a whole picture of the lived experience.

Instrumental in creating this holistic picture is the participant. The positivist camp takes the individual to be separate from the researcher, and thus able to be objectively studied. The researcher is able to take the information from the subject and discover how they “really” are. In this sense, the researcher acts as an agent of authority, effectively stating her findings as the “truth,” supported by science and evidence. A sentiment Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999; as cited in Denzin & Lincoln, 2005) evokes in linking the term “research” to European imperialism and colonialism.

Qualitative interpretations, on the other hand are constantly being constructed (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). At the start, the teller constructs their story, choosing what to tell and how to tell it to the researcher. This interpretation will be shaped by what the teller deems important, and what they wish to emphasize to the listener, what image they want to communicate. The story will be re-constructed a second time by the researcher, whether in field notes, or during the course of the interview as she attends to certain aspects and not others, or deem some more significant. Later on, as the researcher synthesises their field notes and makes further interpretations, deciding what and how to code. This continues during the analysis, and writing of the research text, at which point
the researcher makes more interpretations from her first ones. Finally, there is another interpretation by the reader of the research text that the research makes public (Reissman, 1993).

As qualitative research rejected the notion of positivism and moved to post-positivism and post-structuralism approaches, a major focus was to give voice to those who had been silenced by the ‘otherising’ of previous positivist researchers (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Telling the participants’ stories and making their own voices be heard became a driving force in qualitative research, especially with the rise of critical theories such as feminist, race and ethnic, or queer theories. Themes of social justice and equity became especially salient, seeking to grow the knowledge base of oppressive social practices and expose instances of racism, sexism, and homophobia among others (Lincoln, 2010). Using qualitative methods, researchers from critical theory perspectives seek to highlight the politics and power relations that are existent in the lived experiences of the oppressed and otherwise silenced (St.Pierre & Roulston, 2006).

Another goal of critical theories is to impede the Eurocentric production of knowledge in academia, which determined which research methods were “valid” or “reliable” and therefore useful. With all truths being partial and provisional, no single method can assure to represent them all (Lincoln, 2010). This partiality towards research that perpetuated the already dominant group resulted in what Perez Huber (2009) refers to as the apartheid of knowledge, using the term to describe the need for research methods that highlight the experiences and indigenous knowledge of non-dominant groups. This entails at times altering existing methods to better answer the research questions and more richly capture participants’ stories.
These stories will be shaped by the discourse in which they are embedded, as people themselves are constituted within discourse (MacLure, 2003). Defined by Foucault in 1972 (cited in MacLure, 2003) discourses establish what it is possible to be, what it truth, or knowledge, moral, normal; and what is not. These discourses surround everyday acts, constructing individual’s identity and understanding of the world. They express relations of power, permeating institutions and shaping the individuals navigating them into certain social practices and stances.

Power relations are also perpetuated by these social practices, as Gee (1992, as cited in MacLure, 2003) found. Children of white, middle-class homes were constructed from early on into the way of thinking and behaving that are rewarded in mainstream schools. In this process, these particular discourses become “normalized” and are seen as the standard. Yet as Gee (1992; in MacLure, 2003) points out, “discourses are not ‘natural’…lots of groups neither do them nor find them very useful” (p. 123). They do however, serve the purpose of constructing individuals into what is the way of doing things; and those who do not behave the same way are “abnormal.” It is in this exclusion of the non-dominant discourses that Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) finds particular interest.

CDA applies to a domain of qualitative research that emphasizes the connection between everyday social practices and how these translate into social and institutional discourses. CDA researchers are especially concerned with changing social practices that translate into social and institutional exclusion for non-dominant groups. More specifically, their goal is “to identify the workings of power and domination that inhere in
discursive practices, and thereby to facilitate emancipatory social change” (MacLure, 2003, p.186).

CDA focuses on the everyday textual experiences, such as reading writing and talking to examine how these fabricate individual’s identities and realities. In education, CDA has investigated how lessons, assemblies, textbooks and classroom behaviour label certain children as ‘different’ from the desired norm, for example (MacLure, 2003). Analysing these everyday activities can provide a window into the discourses in which individuals are embedded.

Critics of CDA have focused on the incompatibility of its two main epistemologies, linguistics and post-structuralism. Several researchers (Pennycook, 1994; Poynton, 2000; all cited in MacLure, 2003) point to the rigidity of the linguistic analysis field and the fluidity of post-structuralism as incompatible in one single approach. In addition, the idea of the researcher ‘exposing’ a truth hiding between the lines of discourse sits awkwardly with the Foucauldian principle of no external ‘truth’ outside of the researcher and the researched.

Arising not out of linguistics but utilizing principles of discourse, in this study I will use the framework of narrative analysis (Reissman, 1993). This method of narrative analysis is distinct from the qualitative approach of narrative inquiry which employs narratives to present a view of phenomena (Jones, 2009). Narrative analysis, on the other hand, focuses on how elements are sequenced, why some elements are evaluated differently than others, and how the past shapes perceptions of the present, the present shapes perceptions of the past, and both shape perceptions of the future. Some advocates see it as an "empowering" method, as it gives participants the venue to express their own
viewpoints (Garson, 2010). The rationale for choosing this method had to do with the
access it allows to individual’s inner worlds, and examining their own lived experiences.
Individuals construct their reality by organizing their experiences and memories into
narrative forms (Bruner, 1991). As Daiute (2004) explains, several theorists have
proposed that narrating is a means of “identity development, learning and planning for
the future” (p. 112). In telling and re-telling their stories they come to develop their own
sense of self as they process how they perceive themselves and how they wish to be
perceived.

In the process of creating narratives, people construct the stories that organize and
bolster the different “selves” that are used to interact with others and make identity
claims (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000). The experiences that the person chooses to share
have their particular role in this development, as they compromise the historical unit that
validates why the self has developed as it has (Lopez-Damian, 2008). Therefore, the
narrative is a process that represents reality as experienced by the individual, but at the
same time constitutes reality as both the story-teller and the audience are transformed by
it (Bruner, 1991).

Narratives are by nature interpretations. Firstly of the individual telling the story,
choosing which elements to emphasize, ignore, and how to organize them. This story is
then interpreted by the individual attending to it, as their own view of the world organizes
the story being told. The same story is re-interpreted later on if they are transcribed and
used for a text, as well as they will be by the reader. These different levels of
interpretation will be grounded firstly in the language, and then in the cultural, political
and institutional context of the representer (Reissman, 1993).
Defining the different elements of what constitute a narrative is problematic, as different fields will define the criteria for a narrative in different ways. Most scholars agree, however, that sequencing is necessary for a narrative. In narratives, sequencing is necessary in order to make sense of the experience. However, this sequencing can take different forms—depending on the story being told. Reissman (1993) lists three sequence forms that can organize a narrative: chronological sequencing, consequential sequencing, and thematic sequencing. In most of the narratives being studied, the sequence is organized chronologically, but there are instances of consequential sequencing and thematic sequencing by some participants.

Narrative structures refer to the elements in a narrative that hold the story together, Reissman (1993) points to three structural approaches that are used when analyzing a narrative. These were proposed by Labov, Burke and Gee, respectively. Labov’s approach focuses on six common elements that he argues constitute a ‘fully formed’ narrative. These are: 1) abstract (summary of the content), 2) orientation (time, place, setting, participants), 3) complication action (sequence of events), 4) evaluation (significance and meaning of action, attitude of story-teller), 5) resolution (what happened in the end), and 6) coda (returns to present). This approach is useful for stories in which the narrator begins from a primary event and interprets the significance of events in the story.

Burke’s (as cited in Reissman, 1993) method of analysing narratives focuses on five terms: act, scene, agent, agency, and purpose. Through her narrative, an individual will answer questions on what was done (act), when or where (scene), who did it (agent) how they did it (agency) and why (purpose). Still another approach presented by Gee (as
cited in Reissman, 1993) focuses on analysing the oral aspect of the story; changes in pitch, pauses, and other elements that punctuate spoken stories.

The transcription process also dictates and imposes and interpretation on the narratives. Forms of transcripts that ignore features of speech such as pauses, whispers, or emphasis, repetitions, etc might miss important information residing “between the lines”. The way in which the researcher chooses to make a text from the narrative will influence the type of analysis that will result. The transcripts for the interviews of Proyecto Latin@ were produced by researchers of the project, and verified and corrected for accuracy by another researcher who. While I used the transcripts produced by the Proyecto Latin@ team, I took care to compare the audio of interviews to the transcripts to ensure nuanced, utterances, and silences that were relevant to this specific project were not missed.

The importance of the interview context is also subject to debate among narrative theorists. Models such as Labov’s do not take into account the interaction between narrator and listener, focusing instead on the relation between internal clauses (Reissman, 1993). Yet the context in which the narrative is told is intrinsic to its creation. Including the interviewers utterances and interjections allows for a more clear view of the interaction between the two individuals and how the interviewer can collaborate in the narrative-making. The participants were interviewed in both Spanish and English, according to their preference, and some used both languages in the course of the single interview. The interactions between the participants and the interviewers and their shared bilingualism in some cases helped to shape the narratives that were created.

Reissman (1993) also speaks to three language functions that create meaning in a narrative; ideational, textual, and interpersonal. The ideational function refers to the
content of what the narrator is trying to express to the listener; this dominates most of the narrative. The textual function refers to how this content is conveyed; the content between the lines of false starts and repetitions, changes in pitch and pauses. The interpersonal function refers to the relationship between the narrator and the listener; and can reveal information on power and social relations. Narrative analysis allows for interpretation at all three levels; and relating it to higher social contexts in which both the narrator and the listener are situated.

Although the main focus of Proyecto Latin@ was to investigate student engagement in Toronto schools, the length of the interviews and the narrative framework used allowed for students to choose to share their stories and for interviewers to pursue interesting tangents; eliciting various narratives from the students. This is beneficial for this study as the interviews provided opportunities for narratives to be told within the context of the school which can now be analysed. The data collected by the Proyecto Latin@ research team provided an opportunity to look at narratives produced by recent Latino/a immigrant youth about their experiences of migrating and navigating the public school system in Canada.

The data for this thesis will be presented in the two chapters, which were divided thematically into Language (chapter 4) and Social Relationships (chapter 5). For the interview excerpts originally spoken in Spanish, an English translation will be provided directly afterwards, in Italics and between brackets. Some narratives or parts of narratives were produced in English, either because the interviewer spoke only English or due to code-switching. For these narratives originally spoken in English, only the English words will be given. Along with the results, the analysis of the narratives will also be presented.
Chapter 4: Language as Moving Boundary

In their narratives, students prominently positioned language as one of the boundaries they faced when arriving in Canada. This symbolic and social boundary is expressed through the normalization of English proficiency (with few notable exceptions) and the acceptance of the status of English as the ‘official’ language. Therefore, not speaking English immediately connotes a non-official status. In their narratives, students express language as a boundary that intersects with the construction of their identification on different levels. It differentiates English from non-English speakers, and Latino/as who are not proficient from Latino/as and other peers who demonstrate English proficiency. It is also used as a marker for inclusion to certain groups and the exclusion from others, with symbolic markers like accents serving as indicators of language proficiency. In their narratives, Latino/a immigrants position language as a moving boundary, contextualised in different relationships and situations. Throughout this chapter, I will attempt to highlight the way that language is positioned as a boundary within the students narratives and how proficiency, second languages, and accents are used as markers of inclusion and exclusion in social transactions.

Language Proficiency

*English Proficiency*

Primarily, language is positioned as a boundary between those who speak English and those who do not. This exclusion is perhaps best articulated by Marino, a 16 year-old student who had recently arrived from Mexico at the time of the interview. He likens his position as a newly arrived immigrant to being disabled:
O sea, no, tu no entiendes, lo que te da a entender cuando tu a pe… tu recién cuando llegaste aquí que no sabías, o entender nada, que no sabias hablar nada, tu, o sea que es lo que se te hacía … por ejemplo a mí, pues aquí llegar a la escuela, uno llega como sordo, ¿no? Uno llega como mudo, uno escucha pero no sabe lo que te dicen. Uno no, no puede hablar, tu quieres decir esto, pero tal vez, veces que no puedes, hay veces que tu quieres de decir algo pero a lo mejor te callas, así como que, que no, es que no se, así por ejemplo en las clases, yo, yo quiero estar así, yo porque yo, yo, yo cuando yo, lo que yo entiendo es que entiendo un poco más el inglés, pero casi no lo sé hablar.

[Like, you don’t understand, what happens when you firs ... when you have just arrived and you didn’t know, or understand anything, you didn’t know how to speak anything, like it’s what was ... For example, for me, well arriving here to the school one arrives as if deaf, no? One arrives as if mute. One can hear but you don’t know what they’re saying to you. One can’t speak. You want to say this, but maybe sometimes you can’t, there are times that you want to say something but maybe you shut up. Like, I don’t know, for example, in classes, I, I want to be like this, I because when I, I, I, when I, what I understand is that I understand a little more English, but I can barely speak it].

Marino likens not knowing English with being deaf and mute, expressing the loss of agency that Latino/a youth experience when they arrive to Canada with little knowledge of English. His use of pronouns clearly delineates a “we” and a “they,” and effectively positions Marino on the side of the non-English speakers. In addition, when describing his arrival to school, Marino shies away from using the first person “I,”
sticking to a more generic “one” or “you.” His hesitation in forming the last sentences, when he is trying to describe his experience and introducing the first person in his narrative, could be indicative of his inner confusion and struggle to understand exactly his relationship to English and the English-speaking world. As he speaks, he is thinking through and perhaps forming these thoughts for the first time, about his own understanding of this boundary. By characterizing his lack of English proficiency as a disability, Marino expresses his sense of being functionally excluded from those around him, with no recourse for communication left but hand gestures and pointing.

For some newly arrived immigrants, those who speak English are on the other side of this invisible language barrier, whether they are Canadian or Latino/a. Paula, a student from Cuba, speaks of her first days after arriving to Canada:

Like, when I got here, to my ESL class, the teacher started asking me, like for the schedule, no? And I didn’t know what she was talking to me about. And I was like, “what?!” My first days here, they were horrible. People spoke to me, and I was “what is he saying?” And I don’t understand, don’t understand anything. I didn’t understand anything, anything at all. It was very very very difficult. I was for
Level 1 English, but when I got to the school they had already passed it, there as only level 2. So they put me in level 2, without me knowing anything.

Like Marino, Paula positions herself as separate from those who speak English and who she couldn’t understand at all when she first arrived. In the last sentence, the resolution to the narrative is being “put” in a level 2 class that was too advanced for her. This sentence shows another use of positioning in which she is not the agent, but the object of someone else’s action. Her use of repetition (not understanding anything, it being very difficult) emphasizes what she feels were the most salient aspects of her story to communicate to the listener.

When Patricia is asked what was the hardest thing about being a Latina student at her school, she replies confidently that it was the language. Her story reveals how newly arrived immigrants in the school construct the experience of not knowing English as a loss of control.

El idioma. Y digo que el idioma. Porque, uno llega como latino sin saber inglés, te pon, te entregan un papel, ‘Hazlo.’ Y tú como que, ‘¿Y qué es lo que dice?’ Y esta traduciendo. [...] Y yo creo que es difícil por el idioma. Por el idioma y en la escuela. Pero si hablamos de adaptar a Canadá, es muy diferente.

[The language. And I say the language because one arrives here as a Latino without knowing English, they give you a paper, “Do it”. And you are like “And what does it say?” and one is translating. [...] And I think it’s difficult because of the language. Because of the language and in school. But if we talk about adapting to Canada, it is very different].
In her explanation of why language is the most complicated thing Latino/a students have to deal with, Patricia expresses a lack of control in her story of being handed a piece of paper and simply told to “do it” without any idea of what it says or means. She specifically contextualises this struggle with language in the space of school, further speaking to the experience of disempowerment for students arriving into this new school system.

In this sense, students such as Sandra, who had been in Canada for a year at the time of the interviews, feel “defenseless” without the proficiency in English. Yet, for Sandra, those who speak more English “tienen como que mas para defenderse” [have more to like, defend themselves]. In this way, Sandra ostensibly portrays language as a tool that can be used to pierce social boundaries and provide recourse against exclusion.

In Marino’s narrative, one way in which this disempowerment plays out in the construction of self is more evident. While he presents himself as able and willing to participate in class, language is positioned as the barrier that does not allow him to reach that potential. He says,

Porque cuando yo estoy en la escuela, cuando estoy en las clases, yo algunas cosas, yo las entiendo, y yo quiero estar participando. Pero yo no se como hacerlo. […] Yo a veces entiendo el ingles, y quiero hacer una pregunta o algo […] Ves que todos están participando, y pues tu también quieres.

[Because when I am in the school, when I am in class, I, some things I understand, and I want to be participating. But I do not know how to do it. […] I sometimes understand the English, and I want to ask a question or something […] You see that everyone is participating, and you also want to].
Marino can describe the student that he would like to be, participating in class and giving voice to his ideas, but the English language is a barrier that does not allow him to become the student he wants to be or be perceived by others.

Through their narratives, the students articulate a boundary that separates them from those who fluently speak English. Sometimes this boundary is articulated literally, as when Claudia, a 17 year old student from Argentina, describes her experience with Canadian peers: “No me pude identificar con ellos, como que, algo que nos separa” [I couldn’t identify with them, like, there’s something that separates us]. Other times, this exclusion is more subtle, as Marino says, “a veces en las clases te hacen, te hacen un poco más a un lado. Por lo mismo de que no sabes inglés.” [Sometimes in class, they cast you, they cast you a bit off to the side, because of the same issue of not knowing English].

This separation is also acknowledged by the English-proficient group, as evidenced in Paula’s story:

Pero entonces, en las otras clases, como que los estudiantes que son como nacidos aquí, Canadienses, o hablan muy bien el inglés, ellos no sé, no les gusta hablar con otros que no hablan muy bien el inglés. O sea yo tengo amistades que hablan muy bien el inglés, que son nacidos aquí, pero son cuatro, cinco. Y cuando me pongo a hablar con ellos, de que mucha gente en este colegio han sido, me dicen “Bueno, es que a lo mejor a muchos no le gustan andar con personas que no saben inglés.”

[But then in the other classes, where the students are born here Canadian, or they speak English very well, they don’t like to talk to others who don’t speak English very well. I mean, I have friends that speak English very well, that are born here,
but they’re four, five. And when I speak to them, about how many people in this school have been, they tell me “Well, it’s just that maybe they don’t like to hang out with people that don’t know English].

Paula’s story adds another layer to the complex boundaries associated with language. Firstly, when describing the other group, she begins by saying Canadians, but then quickly adds “or speak English very well,” pointing to the criteria for inclusion in that group – proficiency in English. As Paula moves on to talk about her friends who do speak English very well, she qualifies it by adding “they are only four, five” effectively distancing herself from the English-proficient group by pointing out that her contact with members of that group is limited. Her last statement, the acknowledgment by other English speakers that “maybe they don’t want to hang out with people that don’t know English,” serves to confirm to herself that this boundary is also drawn by students who are English-proficient. As a boundary, it can only serve its purpose if it is (whether implicitly or explicitly) acknowledged by those excluded as well as those included (Lamont & Molnar, 2002). Through the explanation her friends give her, Paula positions members of dominant, English-speaking groups as actors in the creation of the boundary.

Newly arrived students such as the ones in this study exhibit the internalization of this boundary through their use of positioning and pronouns in their stories. Most simply, the use of clear “us” and “them” language, as in Mario’s explanation of why other students in the class should not mind that the teacher sometimes uses Spanish to explain things to him, “Y no tienen poque tener una mala reacción, porque el me está ayudando. Y yo no entiendo, y ellos saben que yo no entiendo.” [And there is no reason for them to
react badly, because he is helping me. And I don’t understand, and they know I don’t
understand.”

Language Proficiency as a Boundary between Latinos

Even students with whom the participants might otherwise identify, due to their
knowledge of Spanish and their shared Latino/a identification, language proficiency
effectively divides them. Marino narrates how other students who know more English
purposefully withhold information and refuse to translate for those who do not yet master
English. He says of some Mexican students in his drama class, “no te quieren decir
porque quieren humillar a uno, de que como ellos saben mas ingles” [They don’t want to
tell you because they want to humiliate you, since they know more English]. On the
border of language proficiency, even those who speak Spanish can be on the other side.
In effect, these more English proficient Latino/as are seen as reinforcing the boundary
through their refusal to translate for their peers. Marino might be expressing a more
developed individualistic ideology that is transmitted by the school system and dominant
culture, a belief that success is granted through individual hard work.

At the same time, this reluctance to help other Latino/a students might also be a
claim of a more powerful status granted by a higher proficiency in English.

Even in less explicitly differentiated situations, English proficient students are
still positioned as “other” by the recently immigrated participants, (“algunos, algunos, si
te ayudan” [Some, some do help you]). There is a certain tension between Latinos/as
straddling this border between English proficiency and non-proficiency. This tension is
articulated in Marino’s narrative when he positions Latinos/as in two different groups,
characterised by their ability to speak English.
Por ejemplo, pues hay escuelas ¿no? como la escuela la [school’s name] yo pienso que esa escuela es un poco mejor en el aspecto de uno que es Latino ¿no? Porque hay muchas personas que son Latinas y saben hablar inglés y español, y aquí pues en si tu estas un poco aburrido ¿no? Porque pues las personas nos han pasado así como que “waoh así” y más sin embargo si tú también te metes porque tú quieres estar como con personas que saben hablar en el inglés ¿no? Pero como vas a estar con esas personas si ni le entiendes, si no sabes lo que les vas a decir ¿no? Pero pues aquí en realidad hay Latinos pero muy pocos y los pocos que hay ya saben hablar inglés y andan un poco más pero pues uno no aquí a veces esta solo o ahí sentado ahí.

[For example, there are schools, no? Like the school the (school name). I think that school is a little better in the sense that one that is Latino, no? Because there is a lot of people who are Latina and know how to speak English and Spanish. And here in itself you are a little bored, no? Because people have passed by like “wow” like that, yet even if you get in there because you want to be like with people that know how to speak English, no? But how are you going to be with those people if you don’t even understand them, if you don’t know what you're going to say to them, no? But like here really there are Latinos, but very few and the few that there are already know how to speak English and they going a little more, but one here is sometimes alone or just sitting there].

When explaining why it would be better for Latino/a students to be in a school with more Latino/as, Marino positions English speakers as a separate group that he can't relate to, since he can't understand them or know what to say to them. Therefore, having
Latino/as in the school would presumably provide a group to relate to. However, when he talks about the few Latinos/as that are in his school, he qualifies that they “ya saben hablar ingles” [*they already know how to speak English*]. This differentiates them (that speak English) from those Latino/as that he wishes he had at school, with whom he could relate. This phrase also gives the impression of having arrived at a goal, the speaking English goal. Therefore, when asked about possible supports for Latinos, Marino characterizes this distinction by stating that “si vos naces acá, vos sabes ingles, y no necesitas tanta ayuda.” [*If you are born here, you know English, and you don’t need so much help*].

**Spanish Proficiency**

Language proficiency then works to both exclude those who have high language proficiency and give the criteria for inclusion in the Latino/a group to those who don’t. Almost by default, the speaking of Spanish language is one criterion for inclusion (except in certain situations, as noted above) into a group, as it serves to differentiate members from the other, English proficient group. In this sense, Latino/a students speak of most easily relating to other Latino/as, or other people who speak “their language.” For Patricia, this is exemplified in her story of a teacher who speaks Spanish and lived in her home country of Mexico. She talks about getting advice from her teacher, and feeling motivated by their talks. When asked if her teacher inspires her, she responds “Si, que haiga ido a conocer a mi pais me inspira mucho.” [*Yes, that she has been to my country inspires me a lot*]. This special connection is attributed by Patricia to having the shared language of Spanish and feeling a connection to Mexico, as well as feeling valued and listened to.
For newly arrived students such as Claudia, it was easier to talk to Latino/as or people from specific countries of origin. As she explains, it was easier to talk to them, and to know what they were talking about. This explanation points to the importance of a shared cultural frame of reference, to share common knowledge about a history and space. As she explains, for her to be Latina is to be part of a group that is connected through language, and share some traditions.

Interestingly, this identification can also extend to others who display characteristics that students identify or accept as “essential” as “Latino” traits. Paula, a student from Cuba who had been in Canada for two years at the time of the interview, exemplifies this. When discussing teachers in her school, she talks first about her Chemistry teacher, with whom she describes having problems. However, when the conversation turns to her ESL teacher, she audibly perks up and goes on to say they get along very well. When asked to elaborate, she opens by explaining “yo se muy bien que los Latinos somos muy sociables, de mucha alegría, como hablando” [I know very well that us Latinos are very sociable, with a lot of joy, like talking] and then goes on to say that “So, me va muy bien con ella” [So, I get along very well with her]. This association between the traits that Paula perceives as being Latino/a: being sociable, and joyful, makes it easier for her to identify with people that exhibit those same traits, even when those people might not be Latino/a or Spanish speakers.

As well, inclusion in the group can also be attained depending on the level of English proficiency. Many students reported feeling “close” and like a group with other ESL students. As Paula puts it, “como todos hablamos el mismo nivel, nos va bien”. [Since we all speak (at) the same level, we get along well]. There is a feeling of
fellowship to be found, perhaps resulting from the exclusion all non-English speakers feel. As Marino speaks of his ESL class, “o sea, que ellos tampoco pueden decir nada porque ellos están igual que nosotros [...] todos estamos aprendiendo apenas el ingles” [they can’t say anything either because they are just like us [...] we’re all just learning English]. Marino’s use of pronouns is telling, at first differentiating an ‘us’ (Spanish speakers) and a ‘them’ (other students in ESL), then uniting into one ‘us’ as ESL learners; based on the criteria of language proficiency. As Claudia expresses, when first arriving to Canada, it was easier to talk to peers from ESL, or immigrants, but “canadienses, no” [Canadians, no]. Interestingly, even though she must still use English to communicate with her ESL peers or other immigrants, the similar level of English proficiency enabled them to identify and be more comfortable with this group.

Even within this group however, language is used as a boundary between different ethnic groups. For example Paula, talks about her friends in ESL:

Tengo muchas amistades de clases de ESL, todas son iranis. Entonces cuando se hablan en grupo, todas se ponen a hablar en su idioma. Y se olvidan de que yo no entiendo, entonces es horrible. A veces me pongo, “porfavor hablen ingles”, y entonces “ah si, si, si, claro, claro, ingles, ingles” y siguen hablando en farsi.” [I have many friends in the ESL class, they are all Iranian. So when they get to talking in a group, they all speak their language. And they forget that I don’t understand, so it’s horrible. Sometimes I say, “please, speak English”” and then “oh yes, yes, of course, English, English” and they keep on talking in Farsi].

Even though Paula introduces them as her friends, she points out that there exist boundaries due to language, excluding herself from their group by qualifying Farsi as
“their” language. In her story, asking them all to speak English makes reference to the group that is created by their shared second language of English. She adeptly adds, “Entonces, es muy complicado” [so, it’s very complicated]. Indeed, the different intersecting boundaries become complicated to unravel.

Speaking Spanish

At the same time, speaking Spanish becomes a marker of exclusion from the dominant group. So that students who speak it (and are not proficient in English) are often targets of discrimination based upon their use of Spanish. As Alicia states:

Nos tratan, bueno, en la de ESL, como que, tratan mejor a los de Vietnam, que a los latinos, porque yo he visto que, mis amigos latinos, ¿no?, empezamos a hablar español. Entonces nos regañan porque obviamente nos regañan. Pero apenas empiezan los otros hablar en su lenguaje, no les dicen nada. Entonces, yo veo como que es un racismo. Solamente cuando empiezas a decir algo en español ya te la están montando. En cambio los demás, se la pueden estar pasando hablando y no les dicen nada.

[They treat us, well, in the ESL, like, they treat those from Vietnam better than Latinos. Because I have seen that, my Latino friends, no? We start speaking Spanish. And they scold us, because obviously they scold us. But when others start talking in their language, they don’t say anything to them. So, I see that it is a kind of racism. Only when you start to say something in Spanish, they are already on top of you. In turn the others, they can be talking the whole time and they won’t say anything to them].
In Alicia’s story both students from other countries who speak other languages
and teachers are positioned in contrast to Spanish speakers. She also makes the
distinction that it is only when they speak Spanish that they are scolded, not for using
non-English language as she observes other students doing. She frames this in her
narrative, as “racism” targeted to Spanish speakers exclusively, while positioning other
language speakers as more favoured by the teachers.

When identifying with other Latino/a students, the marker of the Spanish
language becomes infinitely more important. Enrique notes when he begins to talk about
his experience as the only Salvadoreño student in his school. He qualifies this statement
by adding “aqui hay muchos Salvadoreños, pero solamente hablan ingles.” [Here there is
a lot of Salvadoreños, but they only speak English]. Immediately excluding the other
students who only speak English from the Salvadoreño identity that Enrique claims. After
adding that the majority of the Salvadoreños live in another neighbourhood, he further
clarifies, “yo creo que si esa es una categoría que yo puedo decir yo mismo aquí, que soy
el único. Y mi hermano; solos los únicos que hablamos español yo creo”. [I think that is
a category that I can say myself here, I am only one. And my brother, we are the only
ones that speak Spanish I think]. In addition to using Spanish as a marker to differentiate
him from other Salvadoreños, in his narrative he positions himself and his brother in
isolation from their peers.

Accent

Alicia was 15 when she emigrated from Panama. She recalls when she first
arrived, a year before the interview. In her experience, one of the most difficult things
about the move was the language. She says, “Al principio como que es difícil, porque
hablas solo español. Entonces como que la gente te mira mal, porque no hablas mucho ingles, y el acento es diferente.’ [At first it is like hard, because you only speak Spanish. So people like look down on you, because you don’t speak a lot of English, and the accent is different]. This exclusion felt from her classmates concretely exemplifies the social boundary that language can play for recently arrived students. Markers such as speaking Spanish or having an accent serve to draw this boundary. In Mario’s narrative, he tells the story:

Estaba en el ómnibus con un amigo. Y un Hindú se dio la vuelta, y me dijo que no hable Español, que es Canadá. Un niño de mi edad, y me enojé. Porque me pareció, el es Hindú, no es ser racista, pero ellos hablan Indio, no hablan ingles. Y tenia mas acento que yo en Ingles.

[I was on the bus with a friend. And an Indian turned around, and told me not to Speak Spanish, that this is Canada. A boy my age, and I got mad. Because it seems to me, he is an Indian. It’s not to be racist, but they speak Indian, not English. And he had more accent than me in English].

Mario’s explanation for his anger, that this boy on the bus had more of an accent than him in English, serves to point how these markers are used to draw these boundaries. By claiming less of an accent in English, Mario positions himself as more powerful in the narrative, suggesting he has a better command in English. This is ironic given the broader social context of the actors in the story. Since India uses English as its second official language, it is more likely that the other boy in Mario’s story spoke English fluently. However, the marker of an “accent” in English is used to denote a certain status, with ‘more accent’ having a lower status. In his narrative, Mario uses this marker to position
himself above the other actor in the story, claiming to have less ‘accent’ and therefore a higher status than the other boy.

Agency

Through the use of all the aforementioned social transactions, these students are able to respond to the social boundary of language, using its delineation to differentiate themselves as a group and develop criteria for inclusion in that group. This process of learning about and eventually acknowledging or recognizing these boundaries feeds into the identification these youth construct for themselves. In this process, these students demonstrated a re-development of their sense of agency; as they became more confident and felt more in control in their environment. Identification with the label of Latino/a is accompanied by cues as to what behaviours were expected of you, as well as how to perceive and react to other groups. This sense of identity, albeit temporary (as the process of identification never solidifies or is complete) makes any sense of self-direction possible (Holland et al, 1998).

Even though the majority of newly arrived immigrant students in this study struggle with learning English at first, they are careful to maintain a perspective on their academic performance that does not negatively impact their self as a student. In this manner, Paula explains her hesitation to ask for help from her math teacher because the teacher is “scary.” This places the root of the problem on her teacher’s demeanor.

Similarly, Mario narrates his experience when arriving to school in Canada, and his subsequent absences, which drove his grades down. When the interviewer asks him what he thinks might have been better (“¿Qué piensas tú que hubiera sido algo mejor?”), he responds positioning the cause of the problem on the school’s administration, by not
providing adequate placement and support for English learning. He clearly sees his
response to the situation (not attending school) as the reasonable response to the school’s
imposition of an inadequate placement by stating that the school should place him in the
grade he should be in (“Que me pongan en el grado que debo estar”) - immediately
qualifying the school’s placement as wrong.

Students also attribute their academic performance to their struggle with English,
but not to personal or internal traits. Paula, for example is careful to point out that when
called on during class to answer a question she began to answer, but couldn’t finish due
to her English, “Osea, me lo se en Español, pero no sabia entonces como explicarlo en
ingles en el momento”. [I mean, I know it in English, but I didn’t know how to explain it
in English at that moment]. In the same sense, she also is clear in explaining that she
sometimes doesn’t understand in class “por el ingles” [because of the English], an
important distinction in attribution.

Sometimes, the difficulty in a class can also be attributed to the teacher (another
external factor), such as was the case for Paula’s chemistry class. She describes that at the
beginning, she had “problems” with him and after that didn’t like him at all, so her grades
got down. Now, she is getting along with him better and is understanding more in class.
In Paula’s story, the attribution for her lower grades is made primarily to her relationship
with the teacher, not to her ability as a learner or student. In fact, she has the opposite
experience with her ESL teacher, with whom she gets along very well, and so her grades
in that class are much higher “in the 80s”.

Paula’s description of her struggle with English upon her arrival, also points to an
external attribution. She describes the English in Canada as “medio revuelto” [kind of
scrambled], also adding that although the alphabet is pronounced, it is not written as it should be, contrasting it with the Spanish language. In this simple explanation, she deftly places the blame of her struggle on the language itself. By contrasting it with the Spanish language, she could also be contrasting the different images of herself as a student. By attributing her lower grades in Canada to the English not being “pronounced as it should be”, she justifies her drop in grades from 90’s in Cuba where the language is not “scrambled”.

In this same vein, she also explains that the English she learned before coming to Canada was not like the English here ‘at all’. “Por que, en Cuba se estudia inglés, pero no como aquí. Cuando uno llega aquí, te das cuenta de lo que tú sa, lo poquito que sabes, no tiene nada que ver con el inglés que se habla aquí” [“Because in Cuba, English is studied, but not like here. When one arrives here, you realize that the little you know, has nothing to do with the English that is spoken here”]. In fact, when asked about what she learned in grammar, she responds “I just learned, I didn’t learn” before specifying that she only learned about adjective-noun order within a sentence. In her narrative, it is only until she begins to talk about learning English that the responsibility is attributed to the self. With the sentence “se me fueron pegando algunas cosas, y mas o menos así empecé a coger un poco el ingles.” [Some things began sticking and that’s sort of how I began to grasp some English]. It is not until this point in her narrative that Paula fully positions herself as an agent in her narrative.

To further this point, a few seconds later, when asked about her English now, she responds that it’s pretty good, and then uses a personal trait that likens her English to her Spanish, “Ahora el inglés mío, es, bueno, está muy, mucho mejor, pero, tengo, yo hablo
muy rápido, e incluso en mi español a veces [...] y, pero más, más me está dan, mucho mejor que antes” [Now my English is, well, it’s much better. But I have, I speak too fast, even my Spanish sometimes [...] but I’m getting, much better than before]. In qualifying her English on a similar ground to her Spanish, Paula’s ownership over her English become more apparent, as she begins to feel a mastery over her second language.

In order to continue developing this mastery, Paula is clear on the tasks she needs to perform. Therefore, instead of going to Cuba for vacation like her family ‘must’ do to visit the family, she decides to stay in summer school to work on her English. This kind of decision is in stark contrast to the one made for her to move to Canada; further promoting her sense of agency. She makes the decision on her own terms, and of her own volition. She also plans on behaviours that will result in being a better student, such as studying more and asking for clarification in classes, as opposed to “how I used to do”. This conscious decision to change her behavior elucidates a better understanding that she is in control of outcomes such as her grades, and she can change them by making changes herself.

Conclusion

In their narratives about language, students share common elements when discussing this symbolic boundary. Learning English, or becoming proficient in it; is expressed as a goal, or an achievement. In turn, those who have already learned it are placed in more powerful roles than the students who recently arrived and are still learning the language. There is an implicit hierarchy created by the positioning of more English proficient students as more powerful than less proficient ones. Using an ‘accent’ as a
marker of difference, students are able to sometimes even position themselves as more English-proficient (and therefore more powerful) than others. In their narratives, their own accents as Spanish speakers are expressed as responsible for being discriminated against by English speakers. In this way, students create a precarious setup for themselves, in which their inclusion or success as English speakers is by their own making impossible. As immigrants with ‘accents’ and second language learners they have functionally excluded themselves from this English-proficient group.

The danger also lies in their internal attributions of failure or success. In their narratives, students begin to express an individualistic ideology, where they are in control and responsible for their own making. It would follow that any failure to earn inclusion into the English proficient group, or become the students they see themselves at and want others to perceive them as would be attributed to their own deficiencies. The school system, teachers or even peers would not be to blame, but it would be themselves that would be the problem. This could possibly lead to a greater disengagement from school, and for students to give up on their aspirations to get a diploma.
Chapter 5: Social Relationships- The ‘other’ in the construction of the Self

This chapter is about the role of others (peers, adults and family) in the construction of what Latino/a means for the students in this study, and how the different assumptions and expectations from others around them create a tension for students in deciding to claim a Latino/a identification. Participants in this study expressed rejection of some stereotypes while embracing others, thus alluding to a quandary that is set for these youth as they arrive to Canada on embracing or rejecting a Latino/a identification. I want to show that students differentiate themselves from others while making a claim of their Latino/a-ness on the basis of ethnicity, nationality, stereotypes, and morality. Others play a critical role in the construction of Latino/a identifications, so social relationships are an important aspect of this process. The boundaries drawn and enforced by the students and their peers lead recently arrived immigrants to perceive a Latino/a label as laden with negative connotations, while at the same time determined and ascribed to them at birth.

School Expectations of Latinos

Many of the participants in this study shared stories about their experience with placement in the school. For example, many described feeling frustrated or disappointed when they were placed in a grade that they had already completed before arriving in Canada, and which they did not feel was challenging enough. For students like Enrique, his placement in a lower-level class is not a personal affront, but a result of the institutional assumptions and expectations that schools have of Latino/a students.

Por ejemplo, a mi me pusieron, cuando llegue a esa escuela, me pusieron en Essential Math. Yo no quería ese Math. Me miraron las notas de aquí, que estaba

\[\text{For example, they put me, when I arrived to that school, they put me in Essential Math. I didn’t want that Math. They looked at my grades here, that I was doing badly in Math, so they put me in Essential Math. But in El Salvador I was better.}\]

From his perspective, the level at which the school placed him was not appropriate. His explanation of why they placed him in a lower-level course was because he “supposedly couldn’t do math.” Enrique’s narrative is peppered with words that betray his opinion that the school had an image of him that contrasted with his own image of himself as a student. He constantly refers to the administrators’ opinion that he “supposedly” couldn’t take certain subjects. Similarly he talks about being diagnosed with a learning disability as something “they told me”; not as a manner in which he views himself, but as the way in which the teachers viewed him. The way he positions himself in the narratives tells of his struggle to overcome barriers placed by other’s (i.e. teachers and school administrators) lack of belief in his ability and their perception of Enrique as a “deficient” student.

Enrique’s story is echoed in the way other students speak about the way in which their academic placement and their teacher’s behaviours towards them seem to be shaped by the stereotypes and expectations teachers have. For example, Mario explains: “Porque acá son mucho que ‘ah, no entiende, no puede’ lo bajan un nivel, ‘ah este no puede acá’ le ponen una marca mal porque no puede” [because here they are very much like “Oh, this one doesn’t understand, he can’t” they place him in a lower level. “Ah, this one can’t do it here”, they give him a bad mark because he can’t do it]. In excerpt, Mario
expresses his understanding that it is the opinion of the teachers and school administrators that Latinos/as can’t “hack it” and keep lowering their level, or giving them low marks in class. Through his story, he expresses his view that the teachers confuse a lack of understanding with a lack of ability in Latino/a students. The message that is then conveyed to these students is that less is expected of them because they are unable to achieve more. He positions himself as a bystander, and does not make direct reference to himself as an actor in the story, rather chooses to use the third person “uno” throughout. This subtle distancing of his “self” conveys a rejection of a Latino/a identification in this context of school.

Institutional biases against minority students have also been demonstrated by researchers studying the educational institution. Bourdieu (2001) argues that standards used to evaluate children in school derive from the normalized knowledge of the dominant culture. As such, children who have grown up outside of that culture are deemed inadequate or lacking and are effectively marginalized. For students who have arrived from another country, this proves to be an obstacle, since they have been assessed their whole lives with standards deriving from different norms. Therefore, some traits that students identify as Latino/a themselves, and which they are accustomed to in their home country, can be “disruptive” in a Canadian setting. For example, students described Latinos/as as being “sociable”, “outgoing”, and “liking to joke around”; they expressed disappointment that their Canadian peers did not reciprocate in their mannerisms. However, this could be an example of a ‘disruptive’ behaviour that is not encouraged in classrooms.
Sometimes, the placement that students expressed discontent about is part of the students’ identification process. As McLeod (1995; as cited in Young, 1999) proposes, situations and external factors give individuals the “cognitive and discursive capacitities” (p. 34) for them to shape perceptions of them and others. As Enrique narrates of his experience in Special Education class:

Um, a mi me pusieron en Special Ed. (Interviewer: Okay, ¿y?) Y, I didn’t like it, porque ¿cómo se llama?, los niños aquí no hacen las tareas como allá. (Interviewer: ¿Cómo?) So, o sea son muy haraganes, cuando están en Special Ed. supuestamente aquí piensan que al poner todos lo niños que no pueden nada, o sea si pueden porque todo el ser humano puede hacer todas las cosas solamente le ponen en la mente que no puede. Entonces la mente dice que oh no voy a poder hacer nada.

[Um, they put me in Special Ed. (Interviewer: okay, and?) And I didn’t like it, because the kids here don’t do their work like over there (Interviewer: how so?) So, like, they are very lazy, when they are in Special Ed. Supposedly here they think that by putting all the kids who can’t do anything, I mean they can because every human being can do all things, only they put in their minds that they can’t. Then the mind says, ‘oh, I won’t be able to do anything’.]

When asked to clarify on who ‘puts it in their minds’, he responds;

O sea, los mismos profesores dicen: "No, tu no puedes leer, so, tu tienes un learning disability." So, los muchachos mismos, aprenden eso, oh! I have learning disability so I can’t learn. So, ellos lo ponen, los mismos profesores lo ponen en unas clases donde supuestamente no pueden. So, ahí están ellos solamente
In Enrique’s narrative, he positions the teachers as actors in constructing the students’ “laziness,” saying they put students in classes where they can’t do things; where all the students do is “play”. He furthers this point by explaining that the teachers are “putting in their heads that they can’t do [anything]”. In his experience, teachers tell the students they can’t do something, and the students internalize that they can’t learn. He differentiates himself from his other peers in the Special Education class when he positions himself as an actor in his story, by making the decision to leave the class. “Me sali yo solo” [I left all by myself], he says, indicating his belief in his own ability. Enrique affirms that he believes in his ability to do what he sets his mind to, stating “porque todo el ser humano puede hacer todas las cosas” [Because all human being can do anything]. He differentiates himself from those students who internalize the lack of ability, setting
himself apart as an exception, yet stating that all students are capable of making that decision. This internal attribution to individual ability exemplifies some of the individualistic ideologies also expressed by others students in their personal attributions of success.

Adult Relationships

In counter balance to the loss of control expressed by the students upon their arrival to school; it is sometimes through the patience, understanding and encouragement of adults in the school that these students are motivated to take control of their education and develop as learners. As Green et al (2007) state, relationships with caring adults at school can be a positive effect on Latino/a immigrant students, helping even in lowering disengagement levels among that group. Supportive teachers can help students by giving them information on cultural practices, and mitigate some of the emotional stress induced by migration (Conchas, 2001). In providing students support to navigate the school system, Mehan at al (1996; as cited in Conchas, 2001) sustain that teachers foster student identities “oriented toward academic success” (p. 479).

When Alicia speaks of one of her teachers and why she likes her so much, it is due to her “understanding” and “patience,” and because Alicia feels the teacher treats her well. This kind of behavior motivates Alicia to be a better student, making her feel validated and important; developing her confidence in her own abilities. Marino’s description of an inspiring teacher echoes Alicia’s emphasis on the importance of being understood by someone else. While the teacher continues to be a member of the other
non-Latino/a group, there is a validation in feeling that their struggles are acknowledged by someone from another group.

Green et al (2007) found that youth’s engagement levels fluctuated from year to year, commensurate with the levels of support the student experienced that year. The finding that a student’s motivation and effort in class can be influenced by her or his perception of teachers is echoed in Sandra’s narrative. She makes an explicit link between teachers that make her feel understood and have patience with her and her desire to perform in school. She explains, “cuando un maestro es buena onda, pues hasta te dan más ganas de estudiar, y más de echarle más ganas al estudio.” [When a teacher is cool, then you want to study even more, and try even harder to study]. This evaluation of her teacher is very personal, based on what Sandra considers to be “buena onda,” however perceived support has been found to frequently influence behaviours more than the actual received support (Kessler & McLeod, 1985).

Having a connection with a teacher can also enable students’ agency, fostering independence and building confidence. By talking to Patricia about her travels and experiences in other parts of the world, her teacher motivates her to study so Patricia will be able to do “what I want”.

Similarly, having the support of a teacher can help students strengthen their identifications as learners. Mario compares his teacher here with the ones he had in Mexico, emphasizing that the patience in explaining concepts to him as opposed to just teaching on the blackboard. Having the support of a teacher in this way, has helped Mario to understand his learning style, that he is a “hands-on” learner that doesn’t want to sit in a class for an hour and 45 minutes learning “with a pencil and paper.” This gives him an
augmented sense of clarity about his education that he wouldn’t have had without this kind of support.

These positive relationships with school staff help to offset the negative interactions that students first express in their narratives. When speaking of these connections, students position themselves more as actors in their stories, implying a restoration of their sense of agency. Students also begin to express more agency in their learning, distilling some of the negative stereotypes that are communicated through the school system discourse of Special Education classes and placements in lower grades.

Peers

*Isolation from peers*

The way in which students narrate their relationships with peers in school gives a glimpse into how these relations are part of the construction of their own selves. Students’ commonly positioned themselves in narratives as feeling isolated and alone, not fitting in with other peers. Many of the students used personality traits, ethnic labels, and socio-economic status to differentiate “Canadians” from Latinos/as, and claim a Latino/a identification.

For instance, some students differentiated themselves from their peers on the basis of perceived maturity. Adriana, a student from Mexico who came to Canada in 2007, describes her Canadian peers as “mas juveniles” [*more juvenile*] and “eran mas niños” [*they were more childlike*]. Due to this perceived difference, Adriana describes her experience in the classroom as “muy, muy estresante” [*very, very stressful*]. Although the differences in their chronological age was non-existent (Adriana was 14 and her classmates were all 14 or 13), Adriana’s expresses that she did not feel she was in a class
with peers who were equally mature as her, but rather that she was placed with a group that seemed far too young for her.

She elaborates that she would have felt more comfortable with older peers with whom she could socialize, clarifying that she was used to hanging out with older peers, and so she felt “out of place” with her classmates. In this sense, Adriana differentiates herself from her peers by characterising them as childish and immature, while positioning herself as more mature. This is perhaps an attempt to justify the isolation she felt from others in her class, and protecting her self-esteem by claiming a more mature and powerful position in her story, giving a certain image to her audience.

Paula, the student from Cuba, speaks about her feelings of loneliness when asked what her ideal experience in school would be. She says that in addition to being able to understand all her classes, she would like to be able to relate better to all the other students and have a lot more friends. “Porque a mí me gusta tener muchos amigos, pero en este momento no tengo muchos, por el inglés” [Because I like to have a lot of friends, but right now I don’t have many, because of the English]. In a similar fashion to Adriana, Paula explains her feelings of isolation by attributing her lack of friends to the language, not to a personal trait, underscoring the importance of language as a boundary described in the previous chapter.

Claudia voices similar concerns about being a Latina student in Canada. She explains, “acá siempre andan con grupos de su mismo país, yo no tengo ninguno […] Y a veces es difícil porque te sientes como excluida.” [Here they are always with groups from the same country, I don’t have any […] And sometimes it is hard, because you feel like excluded]. Amongst the student body, groups often form in terms of country of origin,
perhaps language. For those students in schools with few Latino/a students, this means they might find it difficult to build a group of friends, at least through identifications with country of origin or language. This exclusion from several groups serves as an indication to Claudia of what group she can participate in (by virtue of language or nationality).

This exclusion can be internalized by students and further normalized when accepted as “truth”. Isaias, for example when asked to talk about challenges Latinos/as face in Canadian schools, responded “One would be bullying. Because I’m a foreigner, and they don’t take kindly to foreigners.” Isaias’ identification as a foreigner was in part constructed and then reinforced through the actions of his peers, for example, bullying. His explanation of the conflict inherent in being a “foreigner” includes the acceptance that he is a “foreigner”; a word laden with negative connotations, as well as the knowledge that people “here” don’t “take kindly” to him, excluding him from the space altogether.

Ethnic Labels

Participants in this study also used ethnic group labels as a way to differentiate themselves from other students in their schools. Throughout their narratives, students qualify their descriptions of peers by assigning them ethnic and/or racial labels such as “black”, “hindu”, “white”, “Chinese”, etc. These are sometimes used when positioning groups against each other. For example, Leonardo uses pronouns in his narrative that clearly demarcate a boundary between two groups, “There are some students are racist, they don’t like Latinos” he says (emphasis added). When asked to give an example of things that have happened that are racist, he tells the following story
Uh, last time they have like a game, and there was a team, a Latino/a team. And it was our turn to play, and they didn’t say our name. They [said] other name, and they let us there. And we didn’t play, because they didn’t say our name.

The repetition of “they” and “we” / “us” gives the listener a clear sense of the division between both groups. Leonardo attributes this boundary to ethnicity, saying the black teacher who was supposed to call them didn’t like Latinos/as. He narrates confrontations that occurred between “us” (other Latinos/as and him) and this teacher; beginning by saying she was “always saying ‘I don’t like Latinos’” and describing a confrontation in the hallway of school in which he positions the teacher as the initiator of the confrontation. He marks this differentiation by using labels such as Latinos and blacks.

Ethnic labels are not only a common way in which participants differentiate themselves from other groups, but also how they construct their own identification as Latinos/as, particularly through the others’ ratification of the Latino/a group. Sandra, for example, describes that although she likes being in school and learning a new language, “a la vez no [me siento bien], porque hay a veces que nos rechazan a los Latinos, los morenos.” [At the same time I don’t feel good, because there are times that they reject us Latinos, the blacks]. Going into more detail about when she feels “rejected,” she qualifies her peers by their ethnic markers, “Usted sabe que aquí hay mucho moreno, mucho blanco, y así”. [You know here there is a lot of blacks, a lot of whites, and like that]. These labels serve to differentiate the other from ‘us’ the Latino. At the same time, being excluded from the other group by being referred to as “Mexican” serves to confirm Sandra’s membership in the Latino/a group. In her narrative, Sandra uses the Latino/a
and Mexican label as equivalent to the black/white label, positioning Latinos as neither black or white, and instead claiming an ethnic identification as if all three are equivalent. By exclusion to certain groups (non-Mexican, for example), and assertion of membership in another (through use of ‘Mexican’, for example) other groups also feed the identification process for Latinos/as.

This constant exclusion and struggle to fit into their new environment, sometimes leads students to reject the label of Latino/a altogether, due to a perceived negative connotation. Sometimes students react by trying to mask their origins. Marino, for example, says that the answer to the question “where are you from?” will depend on who is asking:

Hay personas, por ejemplo te pregunta uno de aquí y ‘de dónde eres?’ y uno dice ‘de México’ luego, luego dicen ‘ahha’ si, ósea te dicen a humillar dicen ‘ah es mexicano’ y todo, por ese motivo […] les digo que soy de otro país.

[There is people, for example, someone from here will ask you ‘where are you from?’ and one says ‘from Mexico’ and right there they say ‘aha’, yeah like they say to humiliate you ‘ah, he’s Mexican’ and all that, for that reason [...] I tell them I’m from another country.]

While Marino still identifies with the Latino/a label, or with the identity of “Mexican”, the way it is received by others prompts him to conceal that part of himself in an attempt to position himself as non-Mexican to his peers and avoid feeling humiliated.

However, other students, like Isaias, differentiate themselves from the Latino/a group altogether, by pointing to differences in language, or lineage of descendants. When starting to speak about forming a club for Latinos/as to get together, he pauses to make
the clarification “bueno, primera cosa, yo no soy Latino. vengo de Argentina, soy descendiente de europeos.[...] yo hablo castellano, no español.[...] Argentina esta en sud América, pero eso no significa que es Latino.” [Well, first thing, I am not Latino. I am from Argentina, I am descendent of Europeans [...] I speak Castilian, not Spanish [...] Argentina is in South America, but that does not mean it is Latino.] He uses the differences in mixing of races that occurred during the colonization of South America to separate himself from the term ‘Latino’, opting to identify with ‘Argentinian’ instead. Furthermore, he identifies as descendant of Europeans, implicitly positioning himself as White. As other students who positioned Latino/a as neither Black nor White, Isaias’ stance further rejects a Latino/a identification.

Isaias’ construction and resulting rejection of the Latino/a identity might be explained in part by his longer residency in Canada. At the time of the interviews, Isaias had been in Canada for about 6 years, almost double the rest of the participants that were included in this study. His unique more experienced position afforded him a hindsight that was interesting to compare to the rest of the students. When talking about what it meant to him to be a Latino/a student, his narrative shows the construction of a Latino/a identity. This process involves particularly interactions with peers. When speaking of arriving to Canada, “You have to make people understand that you speak Spanish, but you don’t come from a really impoverished country.” Prompted to explain how he would go about doing this, he elaborates, “Em, uh, first I told them ‘Hi, me llamo Ignacio, vengo de Argentina.’ Y casi inmediatamente piensan ‘O, Argentina, pobre’ Que te pasa? No soy pobre, soy como vos. Eh y no se, quizás van a pensar ‘uh, no’” [“Hi, my name is Isaias, I come from Argentin” and almost immediately they think “Oh, Argentina, poor”].
What’s wrong with you? I’m not poor, I’m like you. Eh, and I don’t know, maybe they’ll think “uh, no”]

The interviewer then asked Isaias about this belief, “What makes you think that they thought that Argentina is poor?” To which he simply responded “Because we come from South America.” When prompted by the interviewer to elaborate (okay, did anybody say anything like that to you?), he replies “mm, not that, no, not yet”.

Isaias’ concern with making sure that peers ‘understand’ that Argentina is not an impoverished country and that he is not poor, but actually just like his peers speaks to an internalization that coming from South America and being labeled Latino/a automatically signifies a lower status (socially and economically) to the dominant culture. Although no one had actually said this to him, it wasn’t needed. Isaias’ positioning of himself on a different side of this status boundary illustrates the acceptance and normalisation of this social boundary between Latinos and non-Latinos. His last response, that no one had said this to him yet, further illustrates his belief that this is the position of Latinos/as in Canada amongst others. The usage of the “yet” implies his belief that someone will at some point say this to him, because it is what the others believe about Latinos/as.

For other students, the exclusion from the dominant culture while leading them to identify with the Latino/a group, also makes them perceive this group as inferior to the dominant group. Sandra says of her peers:

Hay a veces que muchos se enfocan mucho por ejemplo en que los rechazan. y como que ellos mismo se siente mal. Y así como “que es que porque nosotros tenemos a...porque nosotros no tenemos que nacer con la misma lengua del ingles,
hay a veces que hasta unos si dicen que es que porque tenían que ser latino, porque no tuve que ser canadiense”. yo he escuchado asi a muchas Latinos que ellos no son satisfechos con el hecho de ser Latinos. Por lo mismo de que hay muchos racista en los Latinos. Pero para mi yo me siento satisfecha y orgullosa de ser Latina

[There is times that many focus a lot on how, for example they are rejected (by others), and how they themselves feel bad. It’s like “why is it that we have ... why weren’t we born with the same English language? There are times that some even say ‘Why did I have to be born Latino, why couldn’t I be Canadian’. I have heard like that many Latinos that are not satisfied with being Latinos. Because there are a lot of racists against Latinos. But for me, I feel satisfied and proud to be Latina].

In her narrative, Sandra speaks of peers who claim a Latino/a identification, while at the same time rejecting it, due to discrimination. However, the Latino/a label is also positioned as something that is ascribed a birth (being born Latino/a), rather than a choice or a concept constructed over time. Therefore even though they might not be ‘satisfied’ by being Latino, it is not positioned as something that they can change or modify; they will always be Latino/a and never Canadian. By positioning these Latinos/as as separate from her, she effectively claims her Latino/a identification as positive, even before explicitly stating so at the conclusion of her narrative. Thereby functionally joining her identification to a positive self-worth.

Meanwhile, Paula draws on distinct differences between Latinos/as and Canadians, which she uses to both explain and justify her feelings of loneliness and lack
of friends in Canada. She describes Cubans as “muy sociables, alegres, compartidor[e]s, que se ayudan entre sí. […] En general así, los cubanos, lo que es los Latinos como tal, somos muy solidarios. Nos tratamos de ayudar entre sí, son mas sociables que los canadienses aquí.” [very sociable, happy, they share, they help each other […] In general, Cubans, Latinos as such, we are very supportive. We try to help each other, they are more sociable than the Canadians here]. A major point of differentiation was social behaviour. While students like Paula described Latinos as friendly and outgoing, quick to make friends; Canadians were said to “se sientan todo el año al lado tuyo, y nunca supiste ni su nombre” [they spend the whole year sitting next to you in class, and you never knew their name]. These essentialized stereotypes of Latinos and Canadians play a major role in setting and inscribing the boundary. In Paula’s narrative, Latinos/as make friends even at the stop while waiting for the bus, “Incluso estás esperando la guagua, y en un momento ya conociste a todos los que estan al lado tuyo. […] Son muy sociables, no tienen que esperar a nada.” [Even when you are waiting for the bus, and in one moment you already met everyone next to you. […] They are very sociable, they don’t wait for anything]. However, when speaking of the way in which Canadians interact, the positioning of characters in her narrative is in stark opposition to her description of Latinos, “incluso aquí, estas en mi edificio que tiene una piscina, yo vi a una amiga mía, y están dos otras personas jóvenes, y entonces unas para aquí, y el otro para allá” [Even here, you are in my building that has a pool, I saw a friend of mine, and there’s these other two young people. And so some go here, and others go there]. Using space in her narrative to physically divide the groups (“para aquí, para alla”).
Throughout their narratives, social relations with peers play an important role in students identification process. Participants in this study used personality traits, and ethnic labels to both differentiate themselves from other peers as well as identify with the Latino/a label. A common theme throughout their stories was feeling isolated from other peers and “not fitting in”. This feeling of loneliness or being a ‘foreigner’ was offset by claiming an identification with a “we” or “us” of the Latino/a group. However, these youth expressed a tension in reaching this identification. Students were caught between the negative stereotypes voiced by others and positive stereotypes of “home”. This quandary was exemplified in the stories of students who admitted to hiding their Latino/a origins from others, while still claiming a Latino/a identification.

Social Class Status

Throughout their narratives, students also use social class status as a way to differentiate themselves from others. As newly arrived immigrants, most families experience a drop in their class status while they settle in a new country (Ko & Perreira, 2010). Lamont (1999) argues that it is necessary to take into consideration the ways in which individuals separate status and worth from social positions when thinking of the process of identification for lower social class status. In her interviews with working-class labourers in the US, she found that more than half of them drew boundaries against the “upper half” based on morality and good interpersonal relationships. By emphasizing these distinctions, workers located themselves above or equal to those in the “upper half”. Through this positioning, they are able to construct identifications with dignity in a society that favours that upper half (Lamont, 1999).
Latino/a youth also used “universally available goods” such as morality, resourcefulness, and interpersonal relationships when drawing boundaries against those in a more privileged class group (Lamont, 1999). Mario, when speaking of students in a more affluent area of the city, refers to its residents as “soft.” When asked to elaborate, he says “nunca hacen problema ahí, porque todos son ricos, y todos son italianos.” [They never make trouble there because they’re all rich and they’re all Italian]. He constructs a differentiation from the other residents using both a class label (rich) and an ethnic label “Italian”, characteristics which he himself does not identify with. His choice of word, to describe them as “soft”, would logically ensue a construction of his self as ‘hard’. He presents himself as more able to “take care of himself” in case of “trouble” such as a fight, while implying that his “soft” counterparts wouldn’t be able to, since “Nunca hay problemas aqui, todos son tranquilos” [there’s never trouble here, they’re all quiet].

Peers are important in this identification process, as feeling part of a group that “has his back” is essential.

Yo no estoy parte de ninguna pandilla, pero es bueno tener gente así para que te ayuden. Si un día, vamos a decir, voy a un barrio y me quieren matar, entonces le digo a unos amigos, vení! Y me ayudan.

[I am not part of any gang, but it is good to have people like to help you. If one day, say I go to a neighbourhood and they want to kill me, then I tell some friends, ‘come!’ and they help me.]

The notion of Latino/as as gang members was a stereotype mentioned often in students’ interviews. However, none of the participants in this study embraced the stereotype. Mario’s narrative, positioning a group of friends who can help you out in case
you need help- yet is not a gang- expresses the tension in accepting or rejecting this stereotype for youth. Although they value the importance of interpersonal relationships and group membership, they outright deny an identification as ‘gang members’.

Some students also used definitions of success as a way to differentiate themselves from the ‘upper half’. Adriana chooses to frame success “differently from other people.” In response to other people telling her she would not be successful if she did not finish her high school, she wants “to prove them wrong”

“Yo veo el éxito diferente a otras personas, para mi el éxito puede ser éxito así conmigo misma, felicidad y todo eso. No necesito un trabajo super bien pagado, para ser exitosa.” [I see success differently from other people, for me success can be success like with myself, happiness and all that. I don’t need a super well-paid job to be successful].

Framing her definition of success using words like happiness, instead of material wealth, enables her to differentiate herself from others, who remind her that she needs a high school diploma to be successful in life. She further elucidates this differentiation at the end of her narrative, as she underscores the message: “Tener tiempo libre para mi misma, no se, ser feliz, no estar todo el tiempo asi como trabajando, trabajando, trabajando, like a workaholic”. [Have free time for myself, I don’t know, be happy, not be all the time like working, working, working, like a workaholic]. Her emphasis on happiness and leisure time, and the subordinate status of wealth draw the boundary to the other, which in this case might also be inferenced from her choice to use English word “workaholic” to point to what she did not want to become.
Family

For many families, the immigration process involves a redefinition of formerly known roles for all the members (Ko & Perreira, 2010). For children this might entail a new identification as a troubled student or wanting to leave school to help support the family; stepping out of their previously held roles.

Adriana’s narrative about her first experience in school, shows how these redefinition of roles and identities can cause tensions and difficulties at home, reflecting on their desire and motivation to go (or stop going) to school. She describes her experience,

Así, tener que estar cambiando de salón a salón a salón. Yo me confundía mucho. Pero pues, realmente no tuve mucha experiencia allí porque solo fui como, como unas, en total podían ser ¿como tres semanas? entonces, no fui casi nada de días. I almost never went there. (Interviewer: Oh ¿faltabas mucho?) Yeah, like I never went. Like never, never, never, never. I think it was [out of] like a whole year. I don’t know. So yeah that’s why I got into a lot of trouble like, with my with my family because they weren’t used to me skipping school. But I didn’t like this school so I skipped a lot, they phoned my home, like, my parents. Yeah, like and then trouble with my parents created me not going more to school, so like, I stay I stay at my friends house and I didn’t go back to my house so that’s like...what happened.

[Like, having to change from classroom to classroom. I got confused a lot. But, I didn’t have a lot experience there because I only went like, in total, maybe 3 weeks? So, I almost never went. (Interviewer: Oh, you were absent a lot?) Yeah,
like, I never went there. Like never, never, never, never. I think it was [out of] like a whole year. I don’t know. So yeah that’s why I got into a lot of trouble like, with my with my family because they weren’t used to me skipping school. But I didn’t like this school so I skipped a lot, they phoned my home, like, my parents. Yeah, like and then trouble with my parents created me not going more to school, so like, I stay I stay at my friends house and I didn’t go back to my house so that’s like...what happened.]

(Interviewer: And how did you get from there to here?)

Ah, yo vine aquí, un semestre y pero yo todavía estaba teniendo problemas en mi casa. Entonces tampoco estaba viniendo aquí mucho no me sentía así como...uh…I didn’t fit in here. Ah entonces también aquí faltaba mucho y algo pasó con una amiga y entonces faltar desde que pasó eso ya no vine aquí otra vez. Me sacaron del programa creo, ni siquiera supe que pasó eso y me quisieron volver a meter aquí. My social worker tried like to get me here again. Y, yo dije, luego, creo que hablé con la vice principal and I told her like, I didn’t want to come back I was forced to.

[Ah, I came here, for a semester but I was still having trouble at home. So I was absent here as well, and I didn’t feel like...uh... I didn’t fit in here. Ah so I was missing a lot of school here and something happened with a friend and so ever since that happened I didn’t come back here. They took me out of the program I think, I didn’t even know what happened and they wanted to put me back in here. My social worker tried to get me here again. And I said, later, I think I spoke to the vice principal and I told her, like, I didn’t want to come back, I was forced to.]
In her narrative, Adriana illustrates that her family had difficulty coming to terms with her newly acquired behavior, causing more problems at home that created a vicious cycle in which she would skip school and have problems at home, so she would skip some more. She explains that her initial motivation for skipping school started with her discomfort due to “not fitting in here.” However, throughout her narrative, Adriana use of words and phrases also allude to her loss of agency during her immigration, possibly starting with her move and being thrust into a school she did not fit into- and her reaction to this loss of control could have been to not go to this school that she was “forced to go to.” Phrases such as “Me sacaron del programa creo, ni siquiera supe que paso y me quisieron volver a meter aca.” [They took me out of the program, I think. I didn’t even know what happened and they wanted to put me back in here], further position her as a powerless character in her story and allude to the loss of control she expresses.

For some students, their new family situations cause them to construct their selves in relation to parents who are facing financial hardships. When families experience a drastic decline in their socio economic status, the children might take unto themselves a different role, feeling they need to step up and help to support the family (Ko & Perreira, 2010). A few students gave examples of their reactions when they first arrived to Toronto. Isaias told his mother, “¿Sabes qué? No hay punto de un estudio. Necesitamos plata y necesitamos plata, y la necesitamos ahora.” [You know what? There’s no point in studying. We need money, we need money and we need it now]. In his story, the family unit (the “we”) is positioned as a unified entity, and the family needs are more important than the individual needs of studying. For some students, this is the only solution- as Alejandro says when he explains he is thinking of leaving school next year to work full
time and help out the family because, “Like help them out con todo [with everything],
and at the house, and y a estudiar y a veces [to study sometimes]… like stressful for me.”
Even though it is stressful for him, he still feels he must help the family out with
everything. The many new roles and responsibilities these youth must assume when their
family’s situation is so drastically changed can prove to be too stressful and re-
evaluations are made to adapt. Youths’ identifications as students and as children must
adapt to their new situations.

Even within this panorama of changing roles and changed perspectives as the
family realigns itself and finds its footing in their new home, certain “traditional” values
are still expressed by the students. Even after talking about disliking being bossed
around, and wanting to do the things she wants to do, Patricia is quick to ascertain that if
it wasn’t for sticking to her parents’ rules she would be “lost.” She positions herself as
subordinate to her parents authority and wisdom, expressing a quasi dependence on their
guidance for navigating life (as otherwise she would be lost); “Porque, si yo, me pongo a
decir, ‘Yo quiero hacer esto y esto’ imagínense, ya estuviera no sé en donde. Entonces no
creo que sea así. Tenemos que acatar las reglas de, nuestros papás.” [Because, if I start to
say “I want to do this, and that”, Imagine, I would be I don’t know where. So, I don’t
think it’s like that. We have to follow our parent’s rules].

Many students also regard their parents as a source of support and encouragement
during their settlement. Paula expresses that it is a parent’s responsibility to guide
children to continue in school, either through chiding (“es que como la mama de él no le
dice nada” [it’s that his mom doesn’t tell him anything about it]) or by example (“él no
ve figuras representativas en su casa, como ejemplo a seguir” [He doesn’t see role
models in his house, as an example to follow). For her, her main motivation for being a good student and getting those good grades is for her mother’s approval. Through grades Paula receives feedback about her academic performance which she uses to construct her identity as a ‘good’ or ‘bad’ student. Coming from her home country with high grades, Paula struggles to maintain or regain her image of herself as a successful student.

The importance of family is expressed in some students’ narratives by the choice of words in describing their close friends. When talking about a cousin who is his role model, Mario describes him as “hermano de sangre” [blood brother]. This choice of adjective points to the importance of family ties for these students. By qualifying his role model as his brother, Mario alludes to how these family connections give students both hope and motivation to get through the hard process of immigration.

Conclusion

Social interactions critically influence the process of identification, as the other is as influential as the self in co-constructing our images of ourselves and our identifications. In their narratives, students’ accounts of interactions with peers, adults and family members demonstrate this interaction as students internalize what they perceive to be others impressions of them while at the time ascerting their own identification, some times in contradicting ways.

In school, youth are confronted by low expectations for Latino/a students from teachers and school administrators. This message that Latino/a students can not perform as well as other students shapes the construction of Latino/a students’ identifications in several ways. In these students’ narratives, a general avoidance of a Latino/a
identification was observed. In Mario’s story, his use of pronouns avoided a Latino/a claim by choosing to not employ a first person narrative. In Enrique’s case, he responded with a re-affirmation of agency, but did not frame it in terms of Latino/a identification. His sense of agency was founded in individualistic terms, with any one person being able to do whatever they set their minds to if they worked hard enough. At least in terms of the school context, the low expectation held of Latinos/as as learners could be part of why the Latino/a youth interviewed do not hold forth an image of a Latino/a student as something they are striving for, but rather something they do not embrace. They express a more general, individualistic ideology of agency and ability.

In contrast to the negative stereotypes communicated through the school’s placement policies and Special Education curriculum delivery, adult relationships were influential in how participants adjusted to their new lives and in the context of school how they constructed their selves as learners. While the low expectations they felt the school held of them was deterrent to their identification as Latino/as, supportive and caring relationships with adults in and around the school system had the opposite effect. Students talked about positive adult influences as very important and how in some cases these helped them to develop a more positive view of themselves as immigrant students.

In their relationships with their peers, most students expressed feeling isolated and not fitting in with others at school. Throughout their narratives, they drew various boundaries to differentiate themselves from others in their peer group. These boundaries could be personal traits, as well as more predetermined boundaries, such as nationality or ethnicity. Interestingly, students did not frame their isolation as something for which they
were responsible themselves, but attributed to outside forces; some which they could change, such a language proficiency, and some more permanent (such as nationality).

The frequent use of ethnic labels in the students’ narratives might be an indication of their own internalization of these labels unto themselves. While identifying with the Latino/a label, students continually refer to peers on the basis of ethnicity or race as well. The internalization of labels such as foreigner or immigrant is also evidenced in their narratives, in particular the negative connotation these labels carry. Some students admitted to avoiding identifying themselves as Mexican to other peers, while some knew of other students who lamented being ‘born’ Latino. This conceptualization of “Latino/a-ness” being ascribed at birth is interesting, as it also signals a lifelong identification. If you are born Latino/a, does it follow that you will always be Latino/a? Or can it change? In turn, is it the negative connotations associated with it that can change, or will a Latino/a label always be considered a burden for these students? At the same time, do the positive generalizations associated with being Latino/a mentioned by students serve to elevate the identification as Latino/a to become an opportunity instead of a constraint?

The one participant in the study who had been residing in Canada for some more time than the others expressed a different identification altogether. While also positioning others as “looking down” on South Americans, he rejected the Latino/a label outright and instead claimed an Argentinian identification. He rationalised this differentiation through historical racial differences, through which he could position Latinos/as as being essentially different from Argentinians.

Students also used social class status as a boundary to differentiate themselves from other peers in Canada. Instead of claiming different socio-economic status, they also
used universally available goods to differentiate themselves from the “upper half.” Using morality and interpersonal relationships to position themselves as morally superior to their more affluent counterparts.

Family relationships were also an instrumental part of the students identification process. In some cases, parents’ view of their child changed upon arrival in Canada, causing stress and tension in the family unit. Youths’ identifications as students and children adapted to new circumstances of life in Canada. However, participants mostly expressed a close family unit with importance placed on family ties that they identified with and with the Latino/a group.

Overall, participants expressed a tension in the identification of Latino/a youth. They rejected many of the negative stereotypes associated with Latino/as, and rejected Latino/a identification in many of these cases. Negative connotations and discrimination by peers was used as grounds for hiding their Latino/a identification from peers, yet it also implied that they still held this identification. Students also put forth positive associations that they identified with being Latino/a, which they held for themselves as well. In these cases, identification with the Latino/a group was evident. Critically important was the essentialist view that students expressed of being Latino/a. This viewpoint positions a Latino/a identification as both an opportunity and a burden. On one hand, negative stereotypes and expectations of Latino/as are associated with the students rejecting identification with this group. On the other hand, positive stereotypes and experiences reinforce an identification as members of the Latino/a group that these students claim. In the specific context of school, these negative connotations to the Latino/a label put students in a vulnerable position as they struggle with conflicting
identifications. In this sense, their quandary of both rejecting and embracing conceptions of being Latinos/as, sets the stage to make it that much harder for these students to succeed in school.
Chapter 6: The Conclusion- What now?

The immigration process is a time of great upheaval, as families leave their known worlds behind to encounter new and different customs and social practices, turning their world “upside down” (Ko & Perreira, 2010). During this process, which can begin months before the actual trip, there are changes that occur within and outside of the family unit that affect how adolescents view themselves, how they view others, and how they are viewed. In their new country, young immigrants are exposed to new social practices that impose on them new status hierarchies, and in turn, their identities are constructed in a different manner.

Through these students’ narratives, I was able to catch a fleeting glimpse into how their process of identification is taking place upon their arrival to Canada. These findings can inform curriculum and practice, as well as provide those charged with working with recent immigrant youth more information of their situation. Improvements can also be made upon this research, to inform future attempts and other investigations.

The Latino/a youth interviewed display extensive use of symbolic boundaries during their identification process. Boundaries help to differentiate them from other groups and are drawn in the context of language, and social relationships with peers, adults, and family. Social relations during their time in Canada aid in constructing symbolic boundaries and later solidify those drawn by the students themselves. These boundaries and the social practices in which they arise also speak to the larger discourse in which they are embedded. In this last chapter, I will revisit some of the main themes explored in the last two chapters, namely the notions of agency vs. passivity and Latino/a
identification vs. non-identification. A discussion of the implications of this research, as well as its limitations and strengths, will follow.

Agency vs. Passivity

An important development in the students’ stories was how they positioned themselves as agents in their narratives. When talking about their experiences upon arrival, students’ narratives display a sense of loss of control over their circumstances. These narratives are characterized by positioning others as acting characters, while positioning themselves as passive figures to whom things happened. In these narratives, their stories figure others taking charge, making decisions that affect them, and a constant reference to “not knowing what was going on.” Anxiety, fear, and confusion are prominent in these narratives of their initial experiences.

As they tell their stories of adjustment, students’ narratives begin to change to display a renewed sense of control. They position themselves as taking action and being initiators, as opposed to witnessing actions. Their positioning of themselves as actors changed in their narratives along with stories of improved English skills. This shift marked a newly developing identification as capable students rather than struggling or failing ones. Students begin acknowledging social practices and boundaries, but instead of feeling excluded, they began using them to form their own groups. Identifying with others and using criteria that would render them superior to groups from which they felt excluded before. Similar to Lamont’s (1999) findings with working-class men, students used moral criteria to differentiate themselves. Therefore, they used markers of sociability, friendliness, importance of family, and such to differentiate and place
themselves above other groups. In this way, they also mobilized a discourse which separates them from the normative centre.

This use of boundaries marks a regained agency for the students. Narratives at this point display a much more optimistic tone. Students express that they know “how things worked” and can therefore successfully navigate them. Through their process of identification, self-direction becomes more possible. This newly found agency allows students to think about their future and what they wish to do once they are done with school. In their narratives, this agency is framed in terms of individual ability and hard work, implying an integration into a dominant discourse of individuality communicated in the school, yet positioning themselves separately from the mainstream.

This change in attributions signals the beginning of the adoption of a more dominant discourse of individual meritocracy. This discourse, reinforced by teachers and the school system (Gerin-Lajoie, 2008; Harper, 1997), seeks to “erase” (or ignore) the power differentials between groups by claiming a “colour-blindness” where all the students are the same. In actuality this does more to reinforce these differences, as deviations from the majority “norm” are explained by ethnicity and culture as if these existed independent of political and economic power relations in society. In addition, the ideology of meritocracy and individuality ascribes success to individual hard work, drive and ambition (Harper, 1997). By default, laziness and deficiency in the individual are what lead to failure. This places students in a precarious position, as they attribute success, but also failure to themselves.

The students interviewed place mastering the English language as a goal in their stories, positioning other Latinos/as who know English as having arrived somewhere, or
achieving an ultimate goal. This objective is expressed conjunctly with fitting in with their peers and others in the Canadian context, with feeling included in the dominant culture. However, markers that some students use to enforce the boundaries between them and others are the same markers that will keep them excluded from the majority group. In fact, symbolic markers such as accents, ethnicity, and speaking another language will continue to express a boundary that is reinforced by these youth at the same time that they wish to cross it.

In light of the paradox they expressed when talking about language, students could be setting themselves up for failure in a self-fulfilling prophecy scenario. This quandary is set up in part by the adoption of the official discourse of meritocracy from part of the students. Embedded in the discourse enacted through the school system is the personal attribution for success of failure in the academic milieu, one where the belief that “todo el ser humano puede hacer todas las cosas” [all human beings can do anything] (interview with Enrique) places the responsibility directly on the individual.

These students then place themselves in a catch-22 position, in striving for an inclusion in the majority group that cannot be achieved on the grounds of the boundaries that they themselves reinforce, and believing in a personal internal attribution for this failure. They leave themselves little option but to blame themselves when their (impossible) mastery of English is “not enough” to be granted inclusion into the “other”, majority group. In this sense power relations between the English-speaking majority and the “others” are reinforced and perpetuated by both English and non-English speakers.
To be or not to be (Latin@)?

The participants in this study often expressed a dilemma between claiming and eschewing a Latino/a identification. On the one hand, negative stereotypes and lowered expectations mostly prompted either a rejection of the Latino/a label or an avoidance of claiming a Latino/a identification in that particular context. For example, a consistent part of the students’ experience in the Canadian school system is the expectation that is set for them as non-English speaking, Latino/a immigrants. Many students perceived the placement into lower grades and Special Education classes as indicative of others’ image of them as deficient students and learners. This contrasted with the image that they held of themselves, leading them to reject a Latino/a student identification. While this pertained to the specific context of school, social relationships with others also led to this tension between Latino/a identification and non-identification.

For some youth, this means a denial of a Latino/a identification altogether, as was the case with Isaias, who differentiated himself from Latinos/as by claiming an Argentinian identification and explicitly denying a Latino/a identification. This was an interesting contrast, as Isaias was also the student who had lived in Canada the longest at the time of the interviews; he represented an interesting position in the quandary that many Latinos/as expressed in their narratives. Would longer residency in Canada lead other students to claim a more specifically national identification, and deny a general Latino/a one?

On the other hand, the official discourse of “multicultural” education in general, and the emphasis on “celebrating diversity” in particular did make a difference in the
experience of these particular Latino/a students in Canada. Many students expressed an interest in participating in more displays of cultural heritage, such as having a Latino/a or Spanish Club, or cultural festivals where they could showcase their Latino/a heritage. It is unfortunate that this pride and interest was encased in a “foods and festivals” approach to multicultural education (Gerin-Lajoie, 2008). In other words, focusing basically on displays of food, customs, and parties they felt relevant to being Latino. In their stories, there was a superficial understanding of the diversity in school, but there was no critical thinking about the differences that they made between themselves and other ethnic groups. From students’ narratives, it was possible to glimpse and understanding of the power differential between groups, as students placed others (and themselves) in a hierarchical order in particular in terms of language proficiency. For example, in positioning themselves in a higher status than someone with “more” accent. Yet there was no indication from their stories that they comprehended the way in which these power differentials were perpetuated not only by others, but also by themselves when they accepted and bought into these hierarchies.

The diversity within the Latino/a group of students was an interesting finding. This was consistent which much of the literature (e.g. Li, 2001; Phinney, 1991) which emphasizes the heterogeneity of ethnic groups and the inaccuracy of conceptualizing ethnic or cultural groups as homogenous masses. Students’ narratives displayed differences not only in their nationalities or ‘foods and festivals’ aspect of their ethnic and cultural identifications, but also in how they negotiated and constructed their immigrant and Latino/a identifications within the new context of the Canadian high school. Phinney (1991) points out that as how ethnic identity matters to someone varies
from individual to individual, which was seen in this group of students in their different claims to Latino/a identification. For individual students, their Latino/a identification was experienced differently; while some students reacted by differentiating themselves more and more from the majority culture, others found it easier to assimilate as much as possible, by trying to “pass” as part of the majority culture. Unfortunately I could not investigate the factors that affected these opposing reactions, as information on the students racial and/or social class status was not available.

Despite of the heterogeneity of the Latino/a group whose interviews were analysed, it is clear that there is a general Latino/a discourse that students employed. For Latino/a students, it was easier to identify and relate to other Latino/as that enacted this same discourse. This affinity went beyond the use of Spanish, as Gee (1999) points out, discourse includes not only language, but also “ways of thinking, acting, interacting, valuing, feeling, believing, and using symbols, tools and objects in the right places and at the right times” (p. 13). These ways of being in the world enact a certain identity, which others recognize. For these students, certain traits were recognizable as “Latino/a” and as such identified them to each other. Some of these traits were positively framed, such as being “friendly” or “sociable,” while others were not so, such as “easily angered.”

Similar to Reich’s (2009) work with Chicano/as in the US, it was a subjective identification with the term Latino/a that made someone Latino/a, not a specific set of criteria. Therefore students could claim or reject a Latino/a identification on different grounds, not always the same.

One of the ways in which this tension between accepting and rejecting a Latino/a identification was exemplified in the many intersecting boundaries that students drew in
regards to language and language use. Students first express language as a boundary that is used to differentiate them from others. The fact that they speak little English and that they speak with an accent functions to exclude them from the majority culture. A direct response to this exclusion is to bond with other Spanish speakers and identify with them, forming a group from which those English speakers are excluded. However, students also begin drawing their own more sophisticated boundaries to include those with poor English proficiency (with whom they identified) and exclude those who speak English well. This complexity in intersecting boundaries is exemplified in students’ narratives in which a Spanish speaker identification is subordinate to a low-level English speaker one. This is interesting as it is displayed not only by recently arrived immigrants, but by other Latino/a youth as well (as told by the students); insinuating that the symbolic and social boundary of language plays a critical role in how students construct their identifications as Latino/as.

Implications, Strengths, and Limitations

Understanding the way in which Latino/a students actively construct their identities upon arrival to Canada provides helpful insights for adults in the school and social services context that work with them. In the context of school, knowing more about identities and the way in which these students engage with the world is beneficial in developing academic tools and support to supplement the existing curriculum in order to engage students more effectively when they arrive.

In the same manner, for front-line workers that deal with these students and their families, research in this area is advantageous when developing intervention strategies
aimed at school retention or family therapies. While designing intervention programs, practitioners, policy makers and researchers must bear in mind the differences within a cultural group that factors such as country of origin, socioeconomic status and area of residence make. By shifting from a view of ethnicity as a static variable to a more dynamic approach, workers will be able to provide more culturally responsive programs that speak to this group.

In addition, more teacher education in diversity is also needed. The adoption of an individualistic and meritocratic ideology by students is in part an indication of the discourse which is created and reinforced through social practices and institutions. The underlying belief that ethnicity and culture are an inherently personal trait, and thus that students are deficient if they differ from the school standards (Gerin-Lajoie, 2008). This personal attribution is internalized as students adopt this majority discourse, and begin to blame themselves for their academic struggles, instead of recognizing the systemic biases that plague the entire school system. As other researchers have stated (Gerin-Lajoie, 2008; Knight, 2004), pre-service programs must integrate more anti-racist education into their training, to facilitate teacher’s understanding not only of their role in student’s lives but also of their place in perpetuating a systemic exclusion for minority students.

While this research was a step in the right direction, it is clear more research is needed to further and more clearly explore this field. The present research had in its favour the use of the adolescents’ voice to tell their stories. In addition, it adds to the growing body of literature on the experience of Latino/a immigrants in Canada, which is at the time rather small.
However, the cross-sectional and brief nature of this particular study was not beneficial and could be improved in future attempts. More rich and context-laden data could have been collected by using a more longitudinal model, and following more strictly with a narrative approach that would have conducted more interviews over a long period of time (Reissman, 1993). This would also have allowed for exploration of themes that emerged in the first interview, but that due to the intent of those interviews were not further explored. Conducting follow-up interviews would have provided the opportunity to investigate these themes and ideas and uncover more detailed stories.

In light of these, more research is warranted in the area. Future examinations could focus on the experiences of immigration including the context outside of school, to bring into sharper focus family and social relationships during this time. In addition as some research (Ko & Perreira, 2010) suggest that the process of immigration begins before the actual move to Canada, research into the pre-travel phase of immigration could also be warranted to explore the process as it unfolds between the two worlds of existence. Further research could also explore how these symbolic boundaries are negotiated within relationships with other adults in adolescents’ lives. Lastly, research that examines how these identifications affect their social relationships with others back in their home country could also be beneficial, to provide a contrast and comparison over time in how these social relationships change.

The area of lived experiences for Latino/a immigrant youth in Toronto is at the time still largely unexplored. The present research took some first steps in examining the process of identification and how students constructed their identities upon arrival to Canada, within the context of the public high school system. The students’ narratives
displayed an initial acknowledgement and subsequent negotiation of symbolic and social boundaries in the construction of their identities as immigrant Latino/as. Through this process, they regained a sense of agency lost with their displacement to a new, foreign country and language. However, their narratives also express an individualistic ideology that could potentially lead these students to disengagement and perhaps school abandonment. Their emphasis on individual ability and achievement is implicitly tied to individual failure, meaning students could attribute any academic or social struggle to a personal ability rather than an institutional bias. The research context for these interviews unintentionally left out a group of students whose input would have been valuable to contrast this research with; those students who had already dropped out. While the interviews carried out in Proyecto Latin@ provided a lot of information about how and why these students stay in school, it is impossible to know why and how others dropped out. This research adds to the body of literature existent at this time, but future research is sorely needed to get a better understanding of the complexities involved in this process.
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APPENDIX A
Interview Protocol- English Version

Introduction

Thank you for agreeing to speak with me. I appreciate your time. This interview will take about 30 minutes, but you may stop the interview at any point. The purpose of this conversation is to talk about your experiences as a Latino/a student at __________________________(school name). This interview is part of a study on Latino/a student engagement and achievement in Toronto’s schools. I’d like to ask you a few questions about your experiences here. Is that okay?

I’d like to remind you that this conversation will be audio-recorded. This will help me to give you my full attention now and return to our conversation later. The interview is confidential, and only the research team and I will have access to this recording, which we will transcribe. If you want me to stop at any time, just let me know. Is this okay with you?

Do you have any questions before we get started?

Please state your name, and your grade.

Perspectives on School Leaving

Have you ever considered dropping out of school? Why or why not?

Prompts:
Can you think of a situation in which you thought of leaving school?
Do you have friends or family that dropped out of school?
What do you think of ____________’s decision to drop out of school?
What would have made a difference in ________________’s decision to drop out of school?

Student Experiences and Disengagement

What is it like to be a Latino/a student here?

Prompts:
How would you describe the teachers here?
Are there any teachers that make you or have made you feel like dropping out of school?
If yes, what happened to make you feel that way?
Are there any teachers who inspire you to work harder and do better in school?
If yes, how so?
What, if any, are the most challenging aspects of being a Latino/a student here?
What advice would you give your teachers on supporting Latino/a students at school?
What school supports are in place for Latino/a students at school?
What school supports are missing but would like to see in place to help Latino/a students at school?

**Latino/a Identity**

How would you describe yourself in terms of your cultural or ethnic background?

**Prompts:**
- What do those labels mean to you?
- How would you say that being ________________ shapes your experiences at school?
APPENDIX B
Interview Protocol- Spanish Version

Introducción
Gracias por venir a hablar conmigo. Esta entrevista durará unos treinta minutos, pero puedes pararla en cualquier punto. Estamos aquí para que hables de tus experiencias como un/a estudiante latino/a en ________________ (nombre de la escuela). Esta entrevista es parte de un estudio sobre las motivaciones y los logros de los estudiantes latinos en las escuelas de Toronto. Te quiero hacer unas preguntas sobre tus experiencias aquí en esta escuela. ¿Está bien?

También quisiera recordarte que esta conversación será grabada. Así podré darte mi atención completa ahora y regresar a nuestra conversación después. Esta entrevista es confidencial - solamente yo y mis socios de esta investigación tendremos acceso a nuestra conversación, que vamos a transcribir. Si quieres que paremos en cualquier momento, házmelo saber. ¿Está bien?

¿Tienes alguna pregunta antes de empezar?

Por favor di tu nombre, tu grado, y el nombre de tu escuela.

Perspectivas en la deserción escolar

¿Has pensado en dejar tus estudios en algún momento? ¿Por qué o por qué no?

Guías:
¿Puedes describir una situación en que pensaste en dejar tus estudios?
¿Tienes familiares o amigos que dejaron sus estudios?
¿Qué piensas de la decisión de tu ______________ de dejar sus estudios?
¿Qué hubiera cambiado la decisión de tu ________________ de dejar sus estudios?

Experiencias y motivaciones estudiantiles

¿Cómo es ser un/a estudiante latino/a aquí?

Guías:
¿Cómo describirías los maestros aquí?
¿Hay algún maestro o maestra que te hace o que te ha hecho pensar en dejar tus estudios?
Si es así, ¿qué sucedió para hacerte pensar en dejar tus estudios?
¿Hay algún maestro o maestra que te inspira a trabajar duro en la escuela?
¿Cómo te inspira este/esta maestro/a?
¿Cuáles son los aspectos más difíciles o complicados de ser un/a estudiante latino/a aquí?
¿Qué consejos darías a tus maestros con respeto al apoyo escolar para los estudiantes latinos?
¿Cuáles apoyos ya existen aquí para los estudiantes latinos?
¿Cuáles son los apoyos para los estudiantes latinos que no existen aquí pero que quisieras que hayan aquí?

**Identidad latino/a**

¿Cómo te describes en términos de tus orígenes étnicas o culturales?

**Guías:**

¿Qué significan esos nombres?
¿Cómo piensas que tu identidad como _________________________ influye tus experiencias como estudiante?
APPENDIX C
Short Survey/Information Sheet- English version

PERSONAL INFORMATION SHEET

Please take a few minutes to answer the following questions. The responses you provide are for our research purposes only and will not be shared with anyone. This questionnaire is voluntary and you are not required to answer any of the questions below in order to continue participating in the project. All of your answers are confidential. Thank you!!

Name: ___________________________________________ Postal Code: ___________________

ABOUT YOU

1. What school do you go to? 
2. What grade are you in? 
3. When were you born? 
4. Where were you born?
   Month       Day       Year
5. If you were not born in Toronto, when did you come to Toronto __________________
6. Do you identify yourself as Canadian? (Circle one) Yes No Depends 
7. What adjectives would you use to describe yourself and your ethnic or cultural background?

8. What other adjectives would you use to describe/identify yourself? These adjectives can describe anything about yourself, such as country of origin, sexual orientation, or activities you are involved in.

9. Has someone said to you or to your parent(s) that you have a learning disability? If so, how would your describe this? Do you need any special accommodations for this challenge?

ABOUT YOUR PARENT(S)/GUARDIAN(S)
10. Where are your parents from? If you know the cities too, please include them.

11. If your parents were not born in Canada, where were they born?

12. When did they come to Canada?

13. Who are the adults that you live with most of the time?

14. What is the highest level of education that your parent(s)/caregiver(s) have completed?

   Parent1 (Circle: Mother or Father):  Elementary  High School  College
   University  Don’t know

   In what country did she receive her highest level of education?
   ________________________

   Parent2 (Circle: Mother or Father):  Elementary  High School  College
   University  Don’t know

   In what country did he receive his highest level of education?
   ________________________

   Other caregiver:  Elementary  High School  College
   University  Don’t know

   In what country did he/she receive her highest level of education?
   ________________________
15. What is the employment status of your parents/caregivers?
   Parent1 (Circle: Mother or Father):
     Works full-time  Part-time  Stay at home parent
     Does not work right now  Retired  Don’t know

   Parent2 (Circle: Mother or Father):
     Works full-time  Part-time  Stay at home parent
     Does not work right now  Retired  Don’t know

   Other caregiver:
     Works full-time  Part-time  Stay at home parent
     Does not work right now  Retired  Don’t know

16. What do your parents/caregiver(s) do for a living? Please write what they do and not where they work.
   Parent1 (Circle: Mother or Father)

   Parent2 (Circle: Mother or Father)

   Other caregiver:

LANGUAGE(S) SPOKEN

17. What is(are) the first language(s) you learned to speak at home?

18. What language(s) do you use the most at home?

19. What language(s) do your parents/caregivers use the most at home? If more than one, please specify
   Parent1 (Circle: Mother or Father)

   Parent2 (Circle: Mother or Father)

   Other caregiver:
APPENDIX D
Information Sheet- Spanish Version

HOJA DE DATOS ESTUDIANTILES

Por favor tómate unos minutos para responder a las siguientes preguntas. Tus respuestas informarán nuestra investigación, y no serán compartidas con nadie. Este cuestionario es totalmente voluntario. No estás obligado/a a responder a las siguientes preguntas para participar en este proyecto. Todas tus respuestas son confidenciales. ¡Muchas gracias!

Nombre y Apellido: __________________________________________ Código Postal: _________________________

SOBRE TI

1. ¿A cuál escuela vas?
2. ¿En qué grado estás?
3. ¿Cuándo naciste?
4. ¿Dónde naciste?
   Mes     Día     Año
5. Si no naciste en Toronto, ¿cuándo llegaste a Toronto?
   _____________________________

6. ¿Te identificas como canadiense? (circula una contestación)   sí   no   depende

7. ¿Qué adjetivos usarías para describirte y tu origen étnico o cultural?

8. ¿Cuáles otros adjetivos usarías para describirte o identificarte? Estos adjetivos podrían describir cualquier aspecto, por ejemplo, tu nacionalidad, tu orientación/identidad sexual, o las actividades en que estás involucrado/a.

9. ¿Hay alguien que te ha dicho o que ha dicho a tus padres que tienes una discapacidad de aprendizaje? Si es así, ¿cómo describirías esta situación? ¿Necesitas alguna modificación para este reto?

SOBRE TUS PADRES/CUSTODIOS

10. ¿De dónde son tus padres? Si sabes las ciudades también, por favor escríbelos abajo.
11. Si tus padres no nacieron en Canadá, dónde nacieron?

12. ¿Cuándo llegaron a Canadá?

13. ¿Quiénes son los adultos con que vives la mayoría del tiempo?

14. ¿Cuál es el nivel de educación más alto que han terminado tus padres/guardianes? Circula tus respuestas.

   Madre: primaria secundaria instituto universidad no sé

   ¿En qué país terminó ella su nivel de educación más alto?__________________________

   Padre: primaria secundaria instituto universidad no sé

   ¿En qué país terminó él su nivel de educación más alto?__________________________

   Custodio/a: primaria secundaria instituto universidad no sé

   En qué país terminó él/ella su nivel de educación más alto?__________________________

15. ¿Cuál es la situación laboral de tus padres/custodios?

   Madre:
   Trabaja a tiempo completo
   Trabaja a tiempo parcial
   No trabaja ahora ama de casa jubilada no sé
16. ¿En qué trabajan tus padres/custodios? Por favor escribe el trabajo que hacen y no el lugar en que trabajan.
   Madre:
   Padre:
   Custodio/a:

17. ¿Cuál es el primer idioma/cuáles son los primeros idiomas que aprendiste a hablar en casa?
    __________________________________________________________
    ______

18. ¿Cuál es el idioma/cuáles son los idiomas que más usas en casa?
    __________________________________________________________
    ______

19. ¿Cuál es el idioma/cuáles son los idiomas que usan más tus padres/custodios en casa? Si usan más de uno, escribe los.
    Madre: _______________________________________________
    Padre: _______________________________________________
    Custodio/a: ___________________________________________