RETHINKING LATIN@ STUDENT ENGAGEMENT:
IDENTIFICATION, COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT, AND TRANSFORMATIVE
LEARNING THROUGH YOUTH PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH

by

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Rethinking Latin@ student engagement: Self-identification, community engagement, and transformative learning through youth participatory action research

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Abstract

My dissertation explores the ways in which youth participatory action research (YPAR) can provide students with the affective and the socio-educational experiences to become agents of personal, social, as well as educational change. My analysis is centred on a YPAR pilot study at Urban High School (pseudonym), a central Toronto secondary school with large numbers of students who self-identified as Latin@. This YPAR program, which was implemented as a Saturday senior social science credit course, involved 20 Latin@ students from diverse national, ethnic and academic backgrounds. Through a transnational Latin@ feminist lens and a methodological framework of YPAR, I examine how the students describe the processes of self-identification, community engagement, and transformative learning. While exploring the students’ perspectives on their engagement and learning throughout the course, this dissertation problematizes conventional forms of schooling and argues for the necessity of shifting schooling towards more culturally relevant and student-centred pedagogies such as YPAR.

The findings of this dissertation present YPAR as an alternative pedagogy that provides students with the opportunities to participate in collaborative learning environments through which they can develop knowledge as well as critically engage with issues that are relevant to them. In turn, this youth-centred pedagogy provides students with various forms of resources that
create vast possibilities for transformative learning on individual and collective levels. Included in these possibilities is the building of relationships as well as critical dialogue on a variety of topics like power relations, gender, race, immigration, and schooling. The opportunities for such critical conversations cultivate a relevant context through which students can develop their research and inquiry skills and acquire a foundation through which to learn more about themselves and their social context. The dissertation concludes with an account of how this YPAR work has been expanded beyond the course and into further work with Latin@ and other groups of youth. This account points not only to the necessity of rethinking conventional forms of schooling, but also to the possibilities that YPAR yields for empowering youth to shift how they see themselves and engage with the world around them.
Acknowledgements

It would be inaccurate to present this dissertation as a product of a single author. In fact, this dissertation stems from the work of a number of people who provided their input in different ways and at different times throughout this research journey. Here, I would like to express my gratitude to the people whose experiences, enthusiasm, and words of encouragement have helped shape not only this dissertation, but also my practices as an academic and educator.

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Table of Content

Introduction: From exploratory research to youth participatory action research: The story of Proyecto Latin@ and Cristina, the Latin@ teacher and researcher .................................1
  Taking U.S. theory on Latin@ students to Canada......................................................5
  Initiating Latin@-Canadian research on education....................................................6
  Implementing Proyecto Latin@...................................................................................7
  YPAR with Latin@ youth: Problematizing common conceptions of research.................9
  The organization of this dissertation.................................................................13

Chapter 1: Latin@ in multicultural Canada, Latin@ in Toronto’s public schools.........16
  What’s in a name? The “Latin@ vs. Hispanic” debate...............................................17
  Hispanic: “Tied by a series of events”.................................................................19
  Problematizing “Hispanic”: Three key problems..................................................20
  Latin@: “The common experience … as a kind of minority person” ......................22
  Establishing the use of Latin@ in the Canadian context.........................................25
  Latin@s in Canada?! ? Tracing the history of the Latin American mosaic in Canada.....27
  21st century Canada: In many shades of brown.................................................27
  Toronto: A “post-modern global village”.............................................................29
  Latin@ students in the TDSB: A brief demographic snapshot..................................30
  Latin@s in Canada: An overview of Latin@ immigration, 1940s-present..............31
  Conclusion...........................................................................................................34
Chapter 2: The theoretical framework ................................................................. 37

Theorizing transnationalism ............................................................................. 40
Latin@ feminism ............................................................................................. 44
Transnational Latin@ feminism ..................................................................... 50
Conclusion ........................................................................................................ 56

Chapter 3: Doing YPAR in Proyecto Latin@: The methodology .................. 58

What is YPAR? .................................................................................................... 58
YPAR in scholarly literature ............................................................................. 59
Writing a dissertation on YPAR: A practice with/in and not with/in research norms.... 62
The key tenets of YPAR ................................................................................. 65
Grasping the momentum and the opportunity ............................................. 70
The Proyecto Latin@ course in action ............................................................ 78
   Student recruitment ..................................................................................... 78
   Doing YPAR: An example of how the adult facilitators did it ................. 82
   Introducing the student researchers ......................................................... 83
   Data collection … and some of the ethical dilemmas that accompanied the
      process ....................................................................................................... 87
   Nonetheless … there’s still a push and pull to the process ...................... 93
   In the face of all this student-centred work, what about questions of validity?.... 95
   So…what did the students’ research projects involve? ............................. 97
Data analysis .................................................................................................... 104
Conclusion ....................................................................................................... 105
Chapter 4: Latinidades in flux: Self-identification as Latin@ in Canada.................106

Talking about latinidad in the YPAR course.......................................................111

Being Latin@: Conversations about colonialism and a(n) (non)indigenous past......116

El español nos une: Unity through the Spanish language – But in what ways?.........121

What do Latin@s look like?: Conversations about phenotype..........................128

Transnational latinidad in Canada: Extending beyond Latinoamérica and to the rest of the world.................................................................133

“She can pull it off because she’s Spanish”: Gendered latinidades....................138

Conclusion..........................................................................................................143

Chapter 5: “En familia ... una comunidad”: Community engagement through YPAR...145

The contact zones...............................................................................................146

Defining community............................................................................................154

Defining community engagement.......................................................................157

Describing community engagement through a 5 tenet model.........................158

Tenet 1: Shared goals...........................................................................................159

Tenet 2: Varied and equitable opportunities for participation.........................164

Tenet 3: Continuous community and relationship building.............................168

“When we all got together in a circle”: The Proyecto Latin@ class

circles.................................................................................................................168

Building community through mealtimes.........................................................172

Tenet 4: Knowledge sharing and building.........................................................174

Tenet 5: Leadership, organizing, and the building of sociocultural
Chapter 6: “Yo creo que cambió mi vida totalmente”: Developing and embodying transformative learning through YPAR

Youth research in action: Proyecto Latin@ goes to Ohio

Transformative learning

Critical reflection and dialogue

Experiential learning and action

Transformation

Changed perceptions of social structures

An increased commitment to continue working towards social and educational change

A changed sense of self-confidence and leadership

A changed understanding and enactment of one’s own cultural identity and values

Conclusion

Conclusion: Present and future directions for the education of Latin@ youth: A testimonio making the case for YPAR in our schools

The research questions

The research findings

Self-identification as Latin@

Community engagement
Transformative learning.........................................................254
Significance of the research.................................................255
YPAR literature.....................................................................255
Curriculum studies and schooling........................................259
The schooling of Latin@ youth.............................................262
The schooling of Latin@ and other marginalized groups in the TDSB........262
Latin@-Canadian studies.....................................................264
Latin@ feminist and transnational studies............................265
Limitations...........................................................................268
Future directions for research..............................................269
Feminist research and gender studies....................................269
YPAR at more schools and for other groups of youth...............270
Longer-term research and leadership development................271
In closing ...........................................................................272

Appendices ........................................................................273

Appendix A1. Table of events in Proyecto Latin@’s exploratory phase........273
Appendix A2. Recruitment flyer............................................274
Appendix A3. Project description..........................................275
Appendix A4. Parent information letter and consent form................276
Appendix A5. Student information letter and consent form.............278
Appendix A6. Focus group 1 protocol.....................................280
Appendix A7. Focus group 2 protocol.....................................281
Appendix A8. Interview protocol ................................................................. 282
Appendix B1. Table of events in Proyecto Latin@’s YPAR phase .................. 283
Appendix B2. Recruitment text for flyers and electronic boards .................. 284
Appendix B3. Parent information letter and consent form .......................... 285
Appendix B4. Application to the Proyecto Latin@ YPAR course .................... 287

References ........................................................................................................... 288
Introduction

From exploratory research to youth participatory action research: The story of Proyecto Latin® and Cristina, the Latin® teacher and researcher

The adage “everything has its story” certainly rings true for the five years that I spent as a graduate student researcher on Proyecto Latin®, which is the joint Toronto District School Board (TDSB) and OISE/University of Toronto study that informs my dissertation. This dissertation is a story that began with my entry into the doctoral program at the department of Curriculum, Teaching, and Learning at OISE/University of Toronto, an entry that led to a journey with a project that began as an exploratory study addressing the educational challenges of Latin® youth in TDSB public schools. Along the way, and along with my colleagues, I encountered a multitude of successes and challenges related to the processes of doing work that was initially on Latin® youth and then became work with and alongside them (Tuck et. al., 2008).

Even to this day, my experiences with Proyecto Latin® continue to figure into my everyday life, whether through the very act of writing this dissertation or through my equity-based work as an Instructional Leader for the TDSB’s office of Equity and Inclusive Schools.

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1 Throughout this dissertation, I utilize the hybrid spelling “Latin@” - rather than “Latina”, “Latino”, or “Latina/o” - as a political means of simultaneously denoting different variations and gendered forms of the word. This orthographic form is not my own; I have borrowed the spelling of “Proyecto Latin@”, the joint OISE/University of Toronto from which I draw my data and in which I have partaken as a Graduate Assistant since its inception in the fall of 2008. While the Spanish language generally takes on masculine and feminine forms, I hesitate to be complicit with its “lexical sexism” (Eisenberg, 1985; Ewe, 2002) and simply declare inclusion of the two binary gendered forms through the “@” sign. Instead, I propose that the “@” sign denote the feminine, the masculine, the neuter, the in-between, and/or any combination of these forms. In light of this hybrid interpretation, I also invite the reader to read, say, or envision the term “Latin@” in the manner(s) that s/he finds most appropriate or fitting in a particular instance and/or context.

2 My job as an Instructional Leader involves providing consultations and training for teaching staff and administration on issues of equity and inclusion in their practices, both in the classroom and in the school as a whole. In addition to being the Instructional Leader to six areas of the cities (Families of Schools), I am responsible for particular system-wide portfolio items, including initiatives related to Latin@ and Portuguese students as well as the new provincial curriculum for courses in the Social Sciences and Humanities.
Had someone told me six years ago that I would soon join an exploratory research project that would expand into a second youth participatory action research (YPAR) phase that would not only form the basis of this doctoral thesis but also impact my pedagogical and professional trajectory, I would have laughed in disbelief.

So how did my work with Proyecto Latin@ begin in the first place? Let me explain. This journey began in the Fall of 2008, which also marked the beginning of my doctoral program at the department of Curriculum, Teaching, and Learning at OISE/University of Toronto. As I was scanning the Graduate Assistantship postings in the first year of my doctoral program at OISE/University of Toronto, I was immediately drawn to the listing for Proyecto Latin@, which sought a graduate student to collaborate on a study addressing the academic challenges of Latin@ youth. I was a teacher on leave from a TDSB high school, and the issues that the project was aiming to investigate resonated with the concerns that I had hoped to address in my graduate studies. Even though I had only been a teacher for one and a half years, I had already witnessed vast disparities at my school that pointed to the ways in which particular groups of racialized students faced systemic barriers that hindered their academic success.

In fact, the pivotal point in my decision to further probe these disparities at the graduate level involves a set of interactions between myself and one of my schools’ administrators, which dealt with my requests to enlist his help in providing resources for one of my students, who I’ll call Antonio. This student, who was of Chilean descent, was identified as having special needs; his Individual Education Plan (IEP) indicated that he required particular accommodations as well as a great deal of in-school support. While I did provide Antonio with all the help that I (felt I) could, including providing him with extra test time and alternate explanations – which had to happen during the lunch hour and after school – it was beyond the scope of my abilities and
qualifications to provide all the necessary accommodations to foster his success. As such, I approached one of the school’s administrators on several occasions for advice on how to best help Antonio. To my ire, however, this administrator was dismissive of my concern for Antonio and always commented that he would not graduate anyway.

Yet whenever it came to the students who came from privileged white families, this very same administrator would push for things like the reversal of zeroes assigned for plagiarized work. In one instance, he asked me to prove that a particular piece of work was plagiarized and added that the student’s mother was a lawyer, to which I responded that she should know better. In the end, I did submit proof of the student’s plagiarism (and on bright yellow paper) and refused to provide the student with a “make-up” on the principle that the school regulations clearly indicated that plagiarism warranted an automatic grade of zero. Moreover, this school regulation information was clearly stated in the student agendas; as teachers, we were required to review the consequences of plagiarism in writing on our course outlines and verbally during the first week of classes.

What, then, was the administrator’s problem? Soon enough, I began to wonder whether my social location had anything to do with the ways in which he interacted with me. At the time, I was twenty-six years old and the youngest teacher on a staff roster of 94 people. As a Latin@ with tan skin, dark eyes, and black hair, I was also a racialized woman. In other instances, this administrator had made comments that clearly pointed to stereotypes of Latin@s, including one incident in which he (supposedly) joked that I would have no issue with classroom management because I could simply demonstrate my “gang signs and shut them up.” While such incidents were quite vexing, I was nonetheless a staff member who possessed the socio-professional capital that enabled me to confidently counter such comments and enlist the support of the
school’s union representative. On the other hand, I also pondered how such stereotypes and
deficit frames of thinking created inequitable educational conditions for students like Antonio.
How many other students experienced similar inequities? Were other Latin@ students facing
similar circumstances that hindered their learning and achievement opportunities?

Indeed, the Graduate Assistant listing for Proyecto Latin@ identified similar research
questions. Initiated in 2008 in response to a TDSB cohort study indicating that almost 40 percent
of Latin@ students were not completing high school, Proyecto Latin@ sought to obtain student
perspectives in order to better understand the factors influencing the educational trajectories of
Latin@ youth in TDSB schools. Adding to the study’s concerns were other bodies of TDSB
research that revealed that Latin@ students in TDSB schools were consistently among the lowest
achieving in various compulsory school subjects like math and science and in provincially
administered literacy tests\(^3\) (Brown, 2006; Brown & Sinay, 2008).

One of these subsequent studies, the \textit{2006 Student Census: Linking Demographic Data
with Student Achievement} (Brown & Sinay, 2008) combined the \textit{Student Census}\(^4\) and \textit{Student
Information System}\(^5\) data to investigate achievement trends in students between grades 7 and 10
according to demographic and family background. Among the key findings were that Spanish-
speaking students from Central and South America were more likely to being identified as
academically “at risk” because of their lower levels of achievement across core courses such as
math and English. Specifically at the secondary school level, these students were also more

\(^3\) These tests are the EQAO Mathematics Test, which is administered to students in Grade 9, and the Ontario
Secondary School Literacy Test, administered to students in Grade 10.
\(^4\) The \textit{2006 Student Census}, which was collected from over 105,000 students between the 7\(^{th}\) and 12\(^{th}\) grades,
marked the first time in which the TDSB collected demographic and student experience data (Yau & O’Reilly,
2007). A subsequent Student Census was distributed and collected during the week of November 21-25, 2011
(TDSB, 2011).
\(^5\) Also known as Trillium, the Student Information System (SIS) is the TDSB’s central information system that
records school, home address, and grade data for each registered student (TDSB, 2007).
likely to have accumulated less than 15 credits, placing them behind their peers and rendering them more prone to early school leaving.⁶

These studies, which marked the first time that a Canadian school board compiled statistical information based on ethnoracial and linguistic background, closely resembled U.S. research on Latin@ students (Guerrero, Gaztambide-Fernández, Rosas, & Guerrero, 2013). In 2005, for instance, only 58 percent of Latin@ students in the United States graduated from high school on time. With respect to math and literacy skills, Latin@ students were found to lag behind their peers; by the end of high school, Latin@ students have math and reading skills that are comparable to white middle school students (Hemphill & Vanneman, 2011).

Taking U.S. Theory on Latin@ Students to Canada

Concerned with the educational disparities encountered by Latin@ students in Toronto high schools and faced with a dearth of research on Latin@ schooling experiences and outcomes in the Canadian context, the Proyecto Latin@ research team scanned the U.S. literature in an attempt to theorize the problem. While the abundant U.S. research provided a starting point for theorizing the educational challenges of Latin@ students in the Canadian context, the vast differences in the demographics and immigration histories between Latin@s in both countries pointed to a significant research gap that required urgent attention. The newly emerging body of Canadian research on Latin@ student achievement tended to overlook theoretical approaches, instead pointing out possible contributing factors like family dynamics, language, immigration and socio-economic status as well as student-teacher relationships, and overall school

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⁶ More recently, the TDSB disaggregated the 2006 Student Census data according to ethno-racial group to create a series of census “portraits.” These profiles, created for eight ethno-racial groups of students, including what the TDSB terms as “Latin American” students, provide a wide range of data such as proportion of the TDSB student population, family and demographic background, and perceptions of school climate (Yau, O’Reilly, Rosolen, & Archer, 2011).
experiences (see Pacini-Ketchabaw, Bernhard, & Freire, 2001; Schugurensky, Mantilla, & Serrano, 2008). Despite this literature gap on the education of Latin@ youth in Canada, there was already a comprehensive and growing body of research on Latin@s as a whole in Canada, which addressed issues relating to immigration (Gosselin, 1984; Mata, 1987), labour issues (Grez, 2005; Ornstein, 2000), and political participation (Ginieniewicz, 2008; Ginieniewicz, Schugurensky, & Infante, 2007; Long & Hughes, 2003). While this scholarly literature does not directly address Latin@ youth, it does provide a starting point for examining various macro-, meso-, and micro-level factors that may interrelate with and influence academic engagement and achievement.  

Initiating Latin@-Canadian Research in Education

In light of all this literature on Latin@s in Canada, however, we Proyecto Latin@ researchers noted the need to conduct a specific and systematic analysis of the roots and conditions contributing to the schooling experiences of Latin@ youth. The dearth in this specific research, however, necessitated an exploratory approach (Stebbins, 2001). To better understand the issues facing Latin@ youth in TDSB schools, we sought the perspectives of the students themselves, probing how they described their schooling experiences, how they explained the high percentage of Latin@ early school leavers, and what they suggested as ways of supporting the academic engagement and success of Latin@ students (Gaztambide-Fernández et. al., 2011).

7 Some examples can include low socio-economic status, refugee status, and family dynamics. Themes such as these do emerge in the Proyecto Latin@ data. See especially the report of the findings for the first phase of Proyecto Latin@, available online at [http://www.oise.utoronto.ca/oise/UserFiles/File/ProyectoLatinoReportJan2011.pdf](http://www.oise.utoronto.ca/oise/UserFiles/File/ProyectoLatinoReportJan2011.pdf).
Implementing Proyecto Latin@\textsuperscript{8}

In the Spring of 2009, a team of OISE/University of Toronto and TDSB researchers\textsuperscript{9} conducted focus groups and individual interviews at six school sites across the TDSB. Over 60 students participated in this exploratory phase of Proyecto Latin@, which comprised two focus groups at each school and 33 scheduled individual interviews. While the focus groups covered different topics on Latin@ student engagement and educational experiences, the interviews focused on each participant’s own perspectives, covering their schooling experiences and those of their family members and peers. Issues of identification were also discussed, as were their personal recommendations for improving the academic engagement and outcomes of Latin@ students. The participants identified with many countries across Latin America, creating a diverse transnational group of students who came from countries like with Colombia, Mexico, and El Salvador, which represent the majority of Latin@ immigrants in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2004, 2007). The linguistic ability of the participants in either English or Spanish also varied, as did their academic profiles and socio-economic backgrounds.

An analysis of the interview and focus group data revealed four cross-cutting themes. First, the students identified language barriers as a hindrance to their success in school; while they noted their determination to learn English, they underscored how factors like improper placement in English as a Second Language (ESL) courses presented them with linguistic obstacles, which in turn affected them academically and socially. Second, the students described

\textsuperscript{8} Please see Appendix A1 for a table outlining the different components and timelines involved in this exploratory phase.

\textsuperscript{9} These TDSB researchers were Mónica Rosas, Vladimir Vallecilla, and Karen Galeano. Mónica was a teacher who volunteered to help collect data for this exploratory phase. Vladimir and Karen both worked for the TDSB department that is now known as Equity and Inclusive Schools. While Vladimir was a Student Equity Program Advisor whose roles involved working with students on equity issues, Karen was an Instructional Leader who supported equity teaching and learning for TDSB staff. As this dissertation moves forward, we shall see how each of these people’s roles in this work evolves.
how their family’s economic circumstances affected their experiences both inside and outside of school. In fact, some of the students described the difficulties they encountered at school as a result of working full-time during the night and attending school during the day. Third, the students described the ways in which stereotypes about their phenotypic features and language negatively affected their relationships with teachers and peers. They denounced the negative stereotypes of Latin@s that cast them as violent, criminal, and lazy, and expressed their indignation of deficit notions regarding the academic capabilities of Latin@s. Fourth, while the students described the ways in which negative relationships with their teachers impacted their schooling experiences, they insisted that their positive interactions with other teachers were instrumental in some of their decisions relating to school.

The students were keen on sharing their recommendations for improvement at the classroom, school-wide, and system-wide levels. Among the numerous suggestions they made were: the implementation of funded “buddy” programs to help newcomers navigate their schools, courses in Latin American history, scholarship opportunities, and cultural sensitivity training workshops for their teachers (Gaztambide-Fernández et. al., 2011; Guerrero, Gaztambide-Fernández, Rosas, & Guerrero, 2013).

Perhaps one of the most passionate suggestions from the students, however, related to the implementation of opportunities for them to act as their own advocates, personally engaging in future initiatives addressing their educational needs. In fact, when we returned to the students to share our findings with them, they were adamant that the project continue with them. Such vociferous appeals catalyzed a meeting in December 2010 with Jim Spyropoulos, the
Superintendent of the TDSB’s office of Equitable and Inclusive Schools. Superintendent Spyropoulos had read the Proyecto Latin@ research report and invited us to a meeting in December 2010 to discuss strategies for the implementation of a youth participatory action research (YPAR) pilot program building on the study’s initial findings (see Guerrero, Gaztambide-Fernández, Rosas, & Guerrero, 2013). It is this very YPAR phase – the methodologies and interactions within the spaces and places of this work – that ground this dissertation.

**YPAR with Latin@ Youth: Problematizing Common Conceptions of Research**

What is important to note here is that this YPAR work challenges predominant notions of research that cast it an esoteric process or set of processes accessible and doable only by adult scholars who plan, initiate, implement courses of action to answer questions about a particular research problem or set of problems. Indeed, Appadurai (2006) problematizes such predominant notions of research and insists that it is “not only the production of original ideas and new knowledge (as it is normally defined in academia and other knowledge-based institutions). It is also something simpler and deeper. It is the capacity to systematically increase the horizons of one’s current knowledge, in relation to some task, goal or aspiration” (p. 176).

This “deeper” conceptualization of research, then, adds a personal dimension to the processes of making “strategic inquiries – and gain[ing] strategic knowledge – on a continuous basis” (p. 168). Additionally, Appadurai makes the case for the necessity of conceptualizing research as a fundamental right for young people. In consideration of an increasingly globalized world, research becomes all the more crucial to democratic citizenship and:

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10 As of September 2013, the TDSB office of Equitable and Inclusive Schools has been renamed Equity and Inclusive Schools.
the social and cultural capacity to plan, hope, desire, and achieve socially valuable goals. 

... [T]he capacity to aspire and the right to research are necessarily and intimately connected. Without aspiration, there is no pressure to know more. And without systematic tools for gaining relevant new knowledge, aspiration degenerates into fantasy or despair. Thus, asserting the relevance of the right to research, as a human right, is not a metaphor. It is an argument for how we might revive an old idea, namely, that taking part in democratic society requires one to be informed. One can hardly be informed unless one has some ability to conduct research, however humble the question or however quotidian its inspiration (p. 176-177).

Indeed, the YPAR work that we did with and alongside the youth involved their aspirations and desire for change in their social contexts as Latin@ students in Toronto. This joint TDSB-OISE/University of Toronto work resulted in a senior social science credit course at the start of the Winter 2011 semester at Urban High School (UHS).¹¹ The course involved a group of 20 students from UHS, some of whom participated in the project’s first phase. A fully bilingual¹² team of four adults who all self-identified as Latin@ and who had been involved with the first phase facilitated the course. This research team included: Principal Investigator Dr. Rubén Gaztambide-Fernández; myself (Cristina) as the Graduate Assistant; Mónica Rosas as the Course Instructor; and Elizabeth Guerrero as the Undergraduate Research Assistant. While Rubén self-identified as Puerto Rican, Mónica self-identified as having both Peruvian and Colombian parentage. Elizabeth and I are sisters, and we self-identified as second generation Ecuadoreans. On various occasions throughout the course, each of us openly referred

¹¹ Urban High School is a pseudonym.
¹² The two languages to which I refer are Spanish and English.
to our national backgrounds and our Latin@ identities. Through the semester, we also learned about the students’ national backgrounds through class activities and other informal discussions.

When it came to communicating with the students, we felt that our bilingualism would be an essential factor in providing the students with the opportunities to fully engage with their course in their preference of Spanish, English, or a combination of the two languages. Moreover, this ability to easily communicate with the students regardless of their linguistic ability also served to facilitate the students’ own processes of research and inquiry. I will return to these details again in the methodology discussion in this dissertation, which is in the 3rd chapter.

In documenting the research in which the students partook over the course of the semester, this dissertation also takes up the processes involved in doing such work. While the body of YPAR literature tends to address the emancipatory nature of doing such work, it also tends to focus on the technical aspects, which can obscure the very personal dimension of doing it in the first place. Indeed, the fact that this YPAR work was conducted in a semestered school-based context also creates particular circumstances that shaped the possibilities and challenges of the research process. During the 120 or so instructional hours as well as in the field work components of the Proyecto Latin@ YPAR course, the students partook in the research process from its inception to its dissemination. In the course of all this joint time and work, the students became a part of both a community collective of youth researchers as well as part of a smaller research team focusing on a specific aspect of the class’ overarching research concerns – concerns related to their collective Latin@ identity as well as their desire to rupture with commonly held conceptions that cast them in negative ways.

This dissertation takes up both the technical and the affective components of the YPAR course, which include not only the successes of the work, but also its challenges. In looking at
the “big picture” of this YPAR work, in my dissertation I analyze how the process of self-
identification as Latin@ mobilizes the processes of community engagement and in turn, fosters
transformative learning. To guide the study of these processes, I probe the following research
questions:

1. How do Toronto public high school students who self-identify as Latin@ construct,
enact, and negotiate their conceptions of latinidad?
2. How do Latin@ students conceptualize community and how do they engage with these
conceptualizations in the Toronto context?
3. How do the processes of identification and community engagement shape transformative
learning in Latin@ youths, particularly in the context of youth participatory action
research?

This YPAR work presented students not only with the opportunity to earn a credit
covering research methodologies but also the opportunity to think critically and see the world
with “different eyes and open eyes” (Cahill, Rios-Moore, & Threatts, 2008, p. 89). In turn, the
youth’s new and different mode of engaging with the issues that matter to them as a transnational
group of Latin@s in Canada comprise a critical “attitude or approach … that is responsive to
local priorities and committed to change” (Cornwall & Jewkes, 1995, p. 1672). As I had
indicated earlier in this introduction through quotes from Appadurai (2006), research presents the
opportunities to increase one’s knowledge as well as the opportunities to reach towards
important goals. In this case, the youth’s goals were able to directly engage in the research as the
researchers rather than as the subjects (Cahill, 2007). In the Proyecto Latin@ course, their
collective voices and input were at the heart of the research agenda at every step, which included
the research themes and questions to the methods of dissemination. The youth’s close
involvement in their own research not only allowed them to co-create knowledge, but also to build “their capacity to speak up as active citizens on matters that are shaping their city and their world” (Appadurai, 2006, p. 175).

In consideration of the stark educational disparities facing Latin@ youth not only in the TDSB but also across Canada and the U.S., it is crucial to engage in conversations and in work that seeks to close the opportunity gaps that hinder their academic success. In addition to the TDSB data that points out such educational gaps, the Board has also implemented various plans of action geared towards improving the academic outcomes and well-being of its students. Among its priority groups are Latin@ students.

The Organization of this Dissertation

How do I discuss the processes involved in this YPAR project with Latin@ youth at UHS? So far, I have used the term Latin@ but have not delved into a discussion of what and who it entails. Oftentimes, discussions about Latin@s are centred on U.S. contexts, which obscure the significant differences of Canada’s Latin@ population, particularly in terms of historical background and national representation. As such, Chapter 1 constitutes an overview of the term Latin@ in general and in the Canadian context. To ground this Canadian context, I also take up the various waves of immigration from Latin America to Canada from post-World War II to the present. This diverse Canadian context also yielded a great deal of data addressing cultural hybridity, diversity, and the students’ desire to contest essentialist and U.S-centric stereotypes that often figured into their lived experiences. In Chapter 2, then, I combine the theories of transnationalism and Latina feminism to create as well as engage in a hybrid theoretical framework of transnational Latin@ feminism. In Chapter 3, I present the methodology, which
constitutes both the technical aspects of the Proyecto Latin@ YPAR work as well as the methodological quandaries that accompanied it. These methodological dilemmas are related both to my own multiple and sometimes conflicting social locations as a researcher in the project as well as the fact that the YPAR work took place in a school credit-based context.

Each data analysis chapter addresses one of the three research questions presented above and are not only informed by each other but are also interconnected with each other. In Chapter 4, I begin this data analysis by probing the students’ conceptualizations and negotiations of *latinidad*. This analysis takes up the students’ conceptualizations of what it means to be Latin@ in Canada and how they self-identify as such. In this chapter, I also examine questions about membership and belonging in the group as well as the diversities within. These conversations about *latinidad* lead to Chapter 5, which takes up the question of community engagement among youth who self-identify as Latin@. Here, I discuss both the multiple and sometimes conflictive interactions between the students and facilitators in the space of the YPAR course. Through such an analysis, I seek to challenge the predominantly romanticized notions of community and community engagement documented in YPAR literature. Chapter 6 takes up the theme of transformative learning, which was drawn from the students’ commentaries of how their engagement with the YPAR work involved a great deal of student-centred dialogue, community building, and collaborative learning. In turn, these interactive processes provided them with a variety of new and transferable skills that they were able to incorporate in the different domains of their lives after the course ended.

In the conclusion chapter of this dissertation, I take the reader to the present as a means of explicating how the Proyecto Latin@ YPAR work has continued to shape my academic and professional work as an Instructional Leader in the Toronto District School Board’s Equity and
Inclusive Schools department. I outline the circumstances that have allowed such work to continue three years after the Proyecto Latin@ YPAR course and reiterate my central arguments about the critical, transformative, and meaningful implications of YPAR. After summarizing the findings of my research, I describe its significance to various fields of research, including YPAR literature, curriculum studies and schooling, and the emerging field of Latin@-Canadian studies. I close the dissertation with some comments about the future of this research, and assert that the students’ direction of their curriculum has paved the way towards changing the future of education.
Chapter 1

Latin@ in multicultural Canada, Latin@ in Toronto’s public schools

This dissertation examines the processes of self-identification, community engagement, and transformative learning as described by students who participated in a study called Proyecto Latin@. This study, in turn, was implemented as a means of addressing the academic challenges of students who self-identified as Latin@. To critically evaluate the processes of self-identification, community engagement, and transformative learning in this dissertation, it is imperative that I first carry out two tasks, which are to contextualize the term “Latin@” and to situate Proyecto Latin@ in the contexts in which it was carried out.

Given that the concept of “Latin@” is central to my analysis, I attempt to unpack the term in the Canadian context and in the Toronto public schools context in particular in four ways. First, I explore the meanings and implications of both the terms “Hispanic” and “Latin@.” It is important that I engage in such a discussion because the two terms are often and erroneously used interchangeably (Alcoff, 2006). Second, I engage in a discussion about the diversity of the Latin@ population in Canada by tracing the five “waves” of immigration from Latin America from the late 1940s to the present (Mata, 1988). Third, I describe the multicultural context of Canada and Toronto in particular so as to lay out the demographic setting in TDSB schools. Fourth, I present some data from the TDSB Student Census to provide a demographic context to the Latin@ student population in TDSB schools.

I will then follow this discussion of the concept of “Latin@” in Canada by tracing the beginnings and implementation of Proyecto Latin@. I then describe each of the project’s two phases, outlining the key events and processes. Because the YPAR phase of Proyecto Latin@ is
at the heart of the analysis in this dissertation, I provide an especially detailed account of the work that the research team (including myself) did in conjunction with the Latin@ youth.

**What’s in a Name? The “Latin@ vs. Hispanic” Debate**

The TDSB research that preceded and later inspired Proyecto Latin@ did not use the term “Latin@” to identify any of its students. Instead, the Board used identification categories based on students’ individual characteristics, including language and ethno-geographic background. Rather than employ the term “Latin@”, the TDSB employed the following terminology:

a) “Spanish-speaking” to designate students who speak Spanish or who have Spanish-speaking persons in their homes;

b) “students who identify themselves as having Latin American racial background” to specify the students’ own racial or ethnic designation, regardless of their generational status; and,

c) “students born in Latin America” as an appellation for the immigrant students from the region (Brown, 2006; Brown & Sinay, 2008; Yau & O’Reilly, 2007).

To refer to the students who possess a combination of the above factors, the TDSB employs the term “Hispanic.” In the TDSB’s Achievement Gap Task Force Draft Report (2010), for instance, the TDSB described students from Spanish-speaking and/or Latin American family background as “Hispanic.” Additionally, and to celebrate the contributions of people with Latin American heritage, the TDSB declared April as its “Hispanic Heritage Month.”

However, an exploration of the meanings and implications of the term “Hispanic” brings with it a problematic discourse of colonialism, domination, and white supremacy (Moya, 2001). Such discourses are especially at odds with the experiential as well as the critical and social-

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13 I borrow the name in quotation marks from Alcoff’s 2005 article “Latino vs. Hispanic: The politics of ethnic names.” For the bibliographic information, please consult the references list at the end of this dissertation.
justice oriented contexts of Proyecto Latin@, particularly the YPAR phase in which the students took on the roles of critical and reflexive researchers (Cahill, 2007) who engaged with their own counter-narratives to “speak back” (Cahill, Moore, & Threatts, 2008, p. 104) to the issues, policies, and institutions affecting their daily lives. While it is certainly the case that I draw my data from a research study entitled Proyecto Latin@, it is overly simplistic to merely assert this name as the rationale for engaging so closely with the concept of “Latin@” here. It is also overly simplistic to assume that the two terms are interchangeable.

Indeed, as Alcoff (2005) argues, ethnic and cultural naming is a complicated process rife with struggles for power, equality, and recognition, regardless of whether the names are “correct” or not. Any debate over an ethnic/cultural name, Alcoff continues, is actually a debate over the ways in which it is historically interpreted, politically examined, and constructed within and outside the communities to which it pertains. To illustrate these points, she explains that Puerto Ricans reject the “Puerto Rican-American” name and thus make the very political statement that their affinity and loyalties lie in their “viejo San Juan14”, not with their U.S. invaders.

While names have the ability to distinguish groups from each other, they also possess the capability to draw them together, cutting across socio-economic class, race, ethnicity, and even political ideologies (Alcoff, 2005; Klor de Alva, 1988). This act of unification is in itself a political process that can potentially mobilize people to collectively articulate a larger voice for a particular agenda or set of agendas (Ishiyama & Breuning, 2011).

Whether a name names a small group or a large group, they still represent a fluid entity that shapes and is shaped by experience. To better understand the context of a name, it is

14 “Viejo San Juan” means “Old San Juan”, a historic community in Puerto Rico dating back to the early 1500s.
necessary to offer “an account of historical formation as well as a project for the future” (Alcoff, 2005, p. 400). In examining the cross-temporal and cross-contextual substance of names, then, we can better understand their “cognitive, social, and discursive dimensions” (Salas, 2008, p. 15). In the text that follows, I examine some of the literature addressing the terms “Hispanic” and “Latin@.”

**Hispanic: “Tied by a series of events”**

The term “Hispanic” became widely used after being implemented by the U.S. Census Bureau as an ethnic identity category in the 1980 U.S. Census (Kent, 2006). Flores-Hughes (2005) explains that in the 1970s, the U.S. federal government’s former Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW) commissioned a committee that would develop categories to facilitate identifying and collecting data on different ethno-racial groups. With respect to the peoples who had Spanish-speaking and Latin American lineage, the HEW considered various terms, including “Spanish-speaking”, “Spanish-surnamed”, “Latin American”, “Latino”, and “Hispanic.” Ultimately, the HEW determined that “Hispanic” would be its term of choice, both in order to avoid confusion with people who had origins in countries with Latin-language histories like Italy and Portugal and with the term “Ladino”, which was the archaic language spoken by the descendants of Spanish Jews (Alcoff, 2005; Flores-Hughes, 2005).

Gracia (2000) conceptualizes “Hispanic” on historical and philosophical grounds, describing it as a term that devoid of a “property or set of properties that describes all Hispanics” (p. 50). He rationalizes that “it is not even necessary that the members of a group name themselves in any particular way or have a consciousness of their identity”, since they are tied together and differentiated by others through a unique “web of historical connections” (p. 48) related to the 1492 encounter between Spain and the Americas. Gracia further explains that while
Hispanics may perceive that they have no shared lineage with the Spaniards, they are nevertheless “tied by a series of events” that renders them a “family” that “came together [with] the encounter of Iberia and America” (p. 50).

**Problematizing “Hispanic”: Three key problems**

The first key problem with the term “Hispanic” is the grave disconnect that it perpetuates between the past and present events and social structures stemming from the 15th century arrival of the Spanish in the Americas. How can we recognize and understand the various layers of oppression encountered by Latin@s if we do not consider their historical roots and the enduring implications of these historical roots? How can we gain a nuanced understanding of the lives of Latin@s if we fail to take into account their experiences and the factors shaping these experiences?

While I concur with Gracia in terms of contemplating historical events, his metaphor of the “coming together of the Hispanic family” (p. 48) suggests consensual kinship, which in turn masks the political, territorial, and human destruction that the Spanish propagated when they arrived in the Americas (Moya, 2001). To neglect this violent 15th century *encuentro* is to overlook, or rather, silence the 500 years of decimation and domination that the indigenous peoples of the Americas have suffered (and continue to suffer) at the hands of their colonizers.

As Ishibashi (1997) and Noguera (1997) argue, it is crucial to recognize the hierarchical colonial structures that continue to control the social institutions and our social interactions within. Neglecting an examination of these structures and the historical social contexts that shape them is itself a colonialist practice that reaffirms and maintains European domination (Alcoff, 2005; Giménez, 1998; Schissel, 1997).
A second key problem with the term “Hispanic” lies in its “methodological” formulation and implementation by the U.S. Census Bureau and other federal agencies. As Portes (1989) points out, the term “Hispanic” is a federally mandated and instituted fabrication intended to conveniently categorize a growing population from Latin America as one group. This conglomeration, he contends, obscures the “histories, glories, and traditions” of the people in different temporal and geographic spaces on the Latin American continent and in its diaspora (p. 125). In the diasporic context of 21st century Canada, a rigid categorical name such as “Hispanic” would overlook both the particular push and pull factors shaping the various waves of Latin@ migration to Canada and the ways in which the experiences of migration shape life as Latin@s in Canada (Gaztambide-Fernández & Guerrero, 2010).

Third, and perhaps the most problematic aspect of the term “Hispanic” is its dismissal of the experiential aspect of the people which it purports to describe. As I have just mentioned in the paragraph above, Latin@s in Canada represent a diverse population with a vast array of political, social, economic backgrounds. Additionally, Latin@s comprise a diverse ethnoracial composite arising from a 500 year history of global in- and out-flows that include European conquest, slavery, immigration, and diaspora (Anzaldúa, 1987; Arrizón, 2006). To overlook these diverse experiences and histories would be to consider Latin@s as a monolithic group, which is contrary to what the academic literature (e.g., Alcoff, 2005) and the data that has been documented in both phases of Proyecto Latin@ (see Gaztambide-Fernández et. al., 2011; Gaztambide-Fernández, Guerrero, Rosas, & Guerrero, 2011).
Latin@: “The common experience … as a kind of minority person”15

Moya (2001) points out that the term “Latin@” refers to “an articulated affiliation, an ‘imagined community’ partly based on the common experience of being interpellated as a kind of minority person” (p. 104). These experiences, she adds, are shaped through various morphological factors, which bear much influence not only on the ways in which Latin@s are treated, but also on the ways in which they interpret their social world. These experiences contribute to the development of an ethnic consciousness, which in turn shapes and is shaped by the group(s) that Latin@s ultimately identify with. Whether the morphology of this ethnic consciousness is linguistic, phenotypic, or a combination of the two, it is a fundamental part of one’s ethnic identity (p. 101).

In terms of national representation, Moya explains that Latin@s encompass a large population residing in the United States who have immigrated or who are the descendants of persons who have immigrated to the country from any of the Spanish-speaking countries in Latin America. She further explains that the visible phenotypic features of Latin@s, while varied, very much figure into the ways in which their social realities are shaped and shape their experiences as Latin@s. She adds that while she would like to envision a society in which external characteristics are inconsequential to how they perceive themselves and how others perceive them, it continues to be a major factor in the lived experiences of many people. As such, “theorists of identity cannot afford to ignore it as a factor in ethnic or racial group categorization (p. 101).

While Roth (2009) also conceptualizes the Latin@ as a pan-ethnic identity category, she

15 I borrow this sub-title from Moya (2001), p. 104.
extends the term outside of the mainland U.S. to include Spanish-speaking Latin American polities such as Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic. She argues that while these political units may not have the same ethno-linguistic diversity of the continental United States, the “strong enduring links and high levels of … activity” (p. 928) between them creates a transnational social field … [that reflects] a dual frame of reference that makes each location relevant for daily life in the other. Within such fields, it is not merely local level interactions that shape ethnic boundaries, but the numerous links that make ethnic groups in distant societies appropriate reference groups. Those links allow non-migrants to form symbolic identifications with other Latin@ groups and create panethnic consciousness (p. 928 – 929).

The concept of a pan-ethnic identity among Latin Americans is not a novel one. Indeed, Cuban independence era writer José Martí addresses unity among the various ethno-racial groups across Latin America in his 1892 essay “Nuestra América”:

[O]ur bodies motley of Indian and creole we boldly entered the community of nations … the urgent duty of our America is to show herself as she is, one in soul and intent, rapidly overcoming the crushing weight of her past and stained only by the fertile bloodshed by hands that do battle against ruins and by veins that were punctured by our former masters. … From the Río Grande to the Strait of Magellan, … the seeds of the new [Latin] America across the nations of the continent (Martí, 1892).

While Martí does not specifically takes up the term “Latin@”, he articulates both mestizaje (ethno-racial hybridity) and a concern with U.S. imperialism as unifying elements in the building of a new post-colonial Latin American continent (Schwarzmann, 2006). While the 21st century context of identifying with Latin America has extended beyond its 21 countries and
into diasporic communities in destination countries such as Canada and the United States, the
notion of *mestizaje* remains ever-relevant, albeit in more complex ways. In addition to taking up
the concept of *mestizaje* in terms of its relationships to issues of miscegenation and colonialism
(Anzaldúa, 1989; Bhabha, 1994; Hale, 1996), it is also important to also consider how this notion
has evolved in ways that complicate the homogeneous yet binary indigenous-European
conception of the mestiz@, which is often taken to be the prevalent imaginary of the Latin@
(Diaz-McConnell & Delgado-Romero, 2004; Wade, 2000). In other words, addressing *mestizaje*
in the 21st century context requires comprehending it as a plurality of identifications with the past
and the present, and with different combinations of blackness, whiteness, and indigeneity
(Chaves & Zambrano, 2006).

In spite of the multiple ways of conceptualizing *mestizaje*, it still remains a partial
means of addressing the many peoples who identify as having some degree of belonging to the
Spanish-speaking Americas16. As I mentioned above, historical and cultural connections to
*Latinoamérica* and the name “Latin@” encompass an array of skin colours and ethno-racial
backgrounds. These connections to *Latinoamérica*, while diverse, require a number of other
layers of ethnic and racial boundaries that would either include or exclude people as Latin@
(Riojas Clark & Busto Flores, 2001), which include perceived shared features such as
geographical family background, food, customs, and language (Roth, 2009).

These shared features, argue Ricourt and Danta (2003), are evidenced through four
different dimensions of Latin@ pan-ethnicity that are embodied through both “unconscious

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16 This notion of “belonging” to the “Spanish-speaking Americas” is not without its problems, as the linguistically-
charged geographical terminology overlooks the many indigenous languages spoken in Latin America. However, in
their work with Latin American indigenous immigrants in the United States, Peñalosa (1986) found that knowledge
of Spanish was perceived as an effective means of navigating their “minority within a minority” status and achieving
a sense of belonging in the Latin@ community.
everyday production and as conscious political acts” (Gates, 2003). While “experiential pan-ethnicity” is cultivated at home, in the community, or in the workplace, “categorical pan-ethnicity” concerns the acts of identifying oneself or others as Latin@s. The third dimension of Latin@ pan-ethnicity, “institutional pan-ethnicity”, develops when community programs and organizations are established to work with Latin@s as a group. The fourth dimension of Latin@ pan-ethnicity is “ideological pan-ethnicity”, which asserts a united Latin@ group as a means of formulating larger numbers and therefore more resources to advance a particular goal or agenda.

The various dimensions of Latin@ pan-ethnicity, which encompass political acts and imaginaries of solidarity (Villenas, 2006), also point to the conception of the Latin@ as a culturally hybrid, fluid, and ever-changing way of naming peoples with historical and cultural connections to Latinoamérica (Gaztambide-Fernández & Guerrero, 2010). Indeed, in recent years scholars have drawn upon postcolonial theories to conceptualize Latin@s as a pan-ethnic and hybrid group created by diasporic flows and the encounters produced between different groups of peoples (Delgado Bernal, Elenes, Godinez, & Villenas 2006; Gaztambide-Fernández & Guerrero, 2010; Mohanty 2003). At the heart of this notion of cultural hybridity is what Homi Bhabha’s (2004) terms the interstitial space, which interrogates binary and essentialist conceptions of culture while addressing “broader processes of cultural imperialism and power relations” (Gaztambide-Fernández & Guerrero, 2010, p. 8).

**Establishing the use of “Latin@” in the Canadian Context**

Despite the promising avenues that the notion of hybridity and diaspora provide for thinking about Latin@s, I am uncomfortable about the risk of addressing this group in the same way across spaces, times, and contexts. As Kraidy (2005) notes, it is of utmost importance to
situate conversations about hybridity in “a specific context where the conditions that shape hybridities are addressed” (p. vi).

In thinking about the term “Latin@” in the Canadian context of this present study, I follow Roth’s (2009) notion of the transnational and pan-ethnic beyond the physical borders of the continental United States and into other political units that have populations of people with origins in the Spanish-speaking Americas. Of course, the Canadian (and, more specifically, the Toronto-based) context of this study necessitates that I extend this hybrid, transnational and pan-ethnic notion of “Latin@” into the Canadian context, which is an area that U.S. scholars have virtually overlooked (see Gaztambide-Fernández & Guerrero, 2010).

I would also reiterate that this hybrid, transnational, and pan-ethnic notion of “Latin@” is one that requires thinking through diaspora rather than through immigration (Gaztambide-Fernández & Guerrero, 2010). While the Latin@ presence in Canada spans only about 6 decades, it nonetheless comprises multiple generations that “combine the individual migration experience with the collective history of group dispersal and re-genesis of communities abroad” (Butler, 2001, p. 192). Compounded in these combinations of generations as well as shared histories is a “sense of becoming … that undergo[es] constant transformation” (Hall, 1990, p. 225).

The term “Latin@”, then, is heavily grounded in the transnational experiences and social location of Latin@s. It is more than a morphological term; thinking through what it means to be Latin@ necessitates a phenomenological undertaking (Alcoff, 2006). In Canadian schools, second generation Latin@s represent a growing population that is not only becoming increasingly mixed in terms of national backgrounds but also in terms of ethno-racial parentage (see Gaztambide-Fernández et. al., 2011). Indeed, an analysis of the Proyecto Latin@ data emphasizes that being “Latin@” involves a multitude of experiences and representations. For
instance, some of the students who participated in Proyecto Latin@ reported also having roots in other parts of the world such as the Middle East and Western Europe. As one student put it, “Latin@s are many “different colours, … dark people and white people” and do not necessarily have to speak Spanish fluently – or at all – to be Latin@.

In this discussion on “Hispanic” and “Latin@”, I have presented some of the academic literatures addressing the meanings and implications behind the term. I followed this examination with a brief introduction to the ways in which I will be conceptualizing the notion of the “Latin@” in Canada and in the Toronto context of Proyecto Latin@ in particular. I acknowledge that I have yet to trace the 60 year history of the Latin@ presence in Canada so as to provide a clearer understanding not only of the various nationalities that comprise the Latin@ population in the country, but also of the political, economic, and socio-historical push and pull factors that contributed to the Latin@ diaspora in Canada. Before engaging in that conversation, I will delineate the context for Proyecto Latin@ through a description of the TDSB and other scholarly research that informed the study as well as the two phases that have been implemented since its initiation in the Fall of 2008.

Latin@s in Canada?!!?: Tracing the History of the Latin American Mosaic in Canada

21st Century Canada: In Many Shades of Brown

According to the figures from the 2006 Canadian Census, Canada’s inhabitants represent over 200 ethnic origins and 100 languages (Statistics Canada, 2007, 2008). Such diversity among the population, particularly in major urban centres such as Toronto and Montreal, became especially salient at the end of the 1960s with the abolition of exclusionary immigration legislation that favoured newcomers from Europe (Reitz & Banerjee, 2006). The subsequent
adoption of legislation and federal programs admitting newcomers under different categories resulted in a shift in the countries from which immigrants originated, thus “browning” the demographic composition of Canada. While almost 90 percent of immigrants to Canada in the late 1960s originated from Europe, in the 1970s more than 50 percent hailed from Asia, the Caribbean, Africa, and Latin America (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2006). Since many of the new immigrants from these non-European sites of origin comprise are “non-Caucasian in race and/or non-white in colour”, they comprise what Statistics Canada (2007) terms “visible minorities.”

Although immigration patterns have continued to shift over time due to various different social, political, and economic factors, “visible minorities” from countries outside of Europe continue to comprise the majority of newcomers to Canada – whether as skilled workers, refugees, investors, or their family members (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2011). Indeed, Statistics Canada projections predict that by 2031, almost one-third of Canada’s total population will comprise “visible minorities”, which includes non-Caucasian and non-European immigrants and their children. These projections are significantly higher for the Toronto context, predicting that “visible minorities” will constitute 63 percent of its population by 2031, an increase of almost 20 percent (Statistics Canada, 2012).

The pluralism resulting from the extensive diversity of “visible minorities”, particularly in relation to notions of race, ethnicity, and language, brings about complex questions about the processes of inclusion and exclusion in Canadian society (Li, 2004; Veronis, 2010). While the entrenchment of legislation such as the Charter of Rights and Freedoms safeguards people from discrimination on grounds like ethnic background and skin colour, such measures offer de jure protection but “are insufficient to guarantee de facto … equality” (Li, 2003, p. 1). Questions
surrounding the social interactions and lived experiences of people from different ethnoracial and linguistic backgrounds are particularly relevant to studies in the city of Toronto, which is not only a key destination for immigrants to Canada but also becoming increasingly “browned” with immigrants from South Asia, China, Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America (City of Toronto, 2013).

**Toronto: A “post-modern global village”**

With a population of over 2.6 million people and representing over 200 ethnic backgrounds as well as over 140 languages and dialects, Toronto is Canada’s largest and most ethno-linguistically diverse city (City of Toronto; 2013; Good, 2009; Statistics Canada, 2007; Statistics Canada, 2012). Such diversity is certainly represented among the students populace of the Toronto District School Board (TDSB)\(^\text{18}\). According to the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) 2006 Student Census\(^\text{19}\) - 42 percent of the respondents reported that they were born outside of Canada (Yau & O’Reilly, 2007, p. 9).

This figure, however, does not fully represent the multicultural, multiethnic, and multilingual diversity of the city’s student population. While this information provides demographic details that would be useful for informing TDSB programming and services, it would be inaccurate to base assumptions of ethno-racial diversity on the above figure alone.

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\(^{18}\) Serving over 265, 000 students across 600 schools, the Toronto District School Board is Canada’s largest school board and the fourth largest in North America (TDSB, n.d.; Zheng, 2009).

\(^{19}\) The purpose of the 2006 TDSB Student Census was to collect data on ethno-racial background, disability, and schooling experiences from students between grades 7 and 12 so as to develop research agendas that would identify factors within the school system that may be contributors to student underachievement. Factors of particular interest to the Board included ethno-racial background, home language, socio-economic status, and the neighbourhoods in which the students reside. The Board sought to implement the results of the survey and the ensuing research to inform future strategies in its mandate to close the academic achievement gap experienced by particular racialized groups of students. Moreover, the student feedback obtained from the survey would aid the Board in assessing the effectiveness of its existing programming, determine student needs not addressed through such programs, removing systemic barriers to student achievement, and allocating resources to where they are most needed (TDSB, 2007).
Indeed, the Student Census involved additional questions addressing the backgrounds of all students, regardless of their generational status. When asked about their racial self-identification, over two thirds of the respondents identified themselves as being non-white (p. 10).

**Latin@ students in the TDSB: A brief demographic snapshot**

The 2008 TDSB student count indicates that there were 5,648 Latin@ students in its schools that year. While 3,754 of those were elementary school students, the remaining 1,884 were attending the city’s public high schools (Galeano, e-mail, March 2, 2009). These numbers are slightly higher than the numbers reported for the 2006 Student Census two years earlier, which indicated that there were approximately 5,300 Latin@ students attending TDSB schools. In contrast to some major urban U.S. school systems in which Latin@s comprise a significant proportion of the student body\(^{20}\), Latin@s account for only 2% of the TDSB student populace (Yau & O’Reilly, 2008).

The 2006 TDSB Student Census figures divide Latin@ students into two sub-groups in accordance with their parentage. For the purposes of the Census analysis, the Central American students (53%) were those who reported parentage from the countries extending from Mexico to Colombia. Students identified as being South American (24%) were those who reported having parents hailing from either Venezuela, the Andean region\(^{21}\), or the Southern Cone\(^{22}\). Latin@ students in the TDSB represent a growing second-generation, as 57 percent of Central American students and 62 percent of South American students reported that they were born in Canada. The third generation comprises a small number, with only 3 percent of students

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\(^{20}\) For example, Latin@ students account for almost 62 percent of the student body in the Houston Independent District School Board and 38 percent of the student body in the Chicago Public Schools system (Sakash & Chou, 2007).

\(^{21}\) The Andean countries consist of Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, and Bolivia.

\(^{22}\) The Southern Cone countries consist of Chile, Argentina, and Uruguay. Many immigrants from this region are descendants of Italian, German, and other peoples who settled in those countries in the late 19\(^{th}\) century and in the first few decades of the 20\(^{th}\) century (Mata, 1988; Recalde, 2002).
reporting that both of their parents were born in Canada (Yau, O’Reilly, Rosolen, & Archer, 2011).

Some students who identified as having Latin American family background also indicated that their parents were born in a country either outside of Latin America or Canada. These students were categorized as having “Other” parentage and were excluded from the TDSB analysis. “[B]ecause the varied combinations within this group were so great that it was not possible to identify a few major sub-groups for comparison,” (Yau, O’Reilly, Rosolen, & Archer, 2011) these students were categorized as having “Other” parentage and were thus excluded from the TDSB analysis. These “Other” students, who comprised 21 percent of the TDSB’s Latin@ student population, raise important questions about the notion of “Latin@” and how its meaning is fluid and shifting in the context of 21st century multicultural Canada (Gaztambide-Fernández & Guerrero, 2010).

**Latin@s in Canada: An overview of Latin@ immigration, 1940s-present**

While U.S. scholarship on Latin@s will be important in helping to theorize this study, it must be noted that the Latin@ presence in Canada is distinct from that of the United States. Through an over 150 year history of U.S. imperialism and large scale immigration, the United States has become the fifth largest Spanish-speaking country in the world (Bonnici & Bayley, 2010; Suárez-Orozco & Paez, 2002; Truet & Young, 2004). In fact, Latin@s comprise almost one-sixth of the total U.S. population\(^{23}\); because of factors like their relative youth and higher than average fertility rates, they are projected to make up between a quarter and a third of the

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\(^{23}\) The U.S. Census Bureau figures from the 2010 count indicate that there were 308,745,538 people living in the United States. Out of this number of people, almost 50 million are of Latin@ descent. Based on projection data from the U.S. Census Bureau’s 2006 *Hispanics in the United States* and *The 2012 Statistical Abstract*, the Latin@ population is projected to surpass 100 million by 2050.
country’s population by 2050. In other words, the Latin@ population in the United States is expected to surpass 100 million in the next 40 years (Saenz, 2010; U.S. Census Bureau, 2008).

In Canada, on the other hand, the Latin@ presence spans only about 60 years. Because of widely differing numbers across various sources, which can be partially attributed to the geographical and linguistic criteria used for identification, it is difficult to determine the exact numbers of this group (Garay, 2000; Ginieniewicz, Schugurensky, & Infante, 2007). For example, Statistics Canada figures from the 2006 Census report a Latin American population totaling 317,000, representing 1 percent of the Canadian population (Statistics Canada, 2007). However, Ginieniewicz, Schugurensky, & Infante (2007) assert that the numbers of Latin@s in Canada may be as high as 700,000, and that many Latin@s may not have completed the Census for reasons including fear of penalties arising from their undocumented status. Even with the Statistics Canada figures, nonetheless, Latin@s represent one of the quickest growing ethno-linguistic groups in Canada, particularly in major urban centres such as Toronto. Between 1996 and 2001, for example, the number of people reporting Latin American origins rose by 32%, while the overall population grew by only 4% (Statistics Canada, 2007).

Whatever the case may be, gaining an understanding of the demographics of the Latin@ population in Canada requires a consideration of the multiple push and pull processes that shape migration from Latin America (Mata, 1988; Veronis, 2006). The interplay between federal immigration policies in Canada and the various social, economic, and political contexts of Latin American countries since the 1960s have propagated numerous waves of immigration, producing a “smaller [Latin American] ‘mosaic’ within the broader Canadian one … [U]rban professionals leaving behind occupational barriers in the homeland are found as often as intellectuals and peasants fleeing military coups and civil war” (Mata, 1988, p. 172). As such, Latin@ students
comprise a demographically diverse group with distinct ethno-racial, socio-economic and political backgrounds.

Mata (1988) identifies Latin@ immigration to Canada in terms of “historical-spatial” waves (p. 188). During the Lead Wave (late 1940s – late 1960s), few immigrants came from Latin America. Between 1946 and 1955, for instance, a total of 1,872 persons migrated to Canada from Latin American countries, representing 0.2 percent of the total immigration during that period (Mata, 1983; 1985). These migrants mostly consisted of small numbers of professional workers from the Southern Cone and Mexico who also had European ethnicities; “Italian-Argentineans, German-Chileans, [and] Dutch-Mexicans are some of the typical immigrants of the 50s and early 60s” (Mata, 1988, p. 194).

Latin@s began to arrive in much larger numbers in the 1970s, which marked the beginning of the Andean Wave (1971-1975) and the Coup Wave (1973-1979). These two waves, which represented labour migration of professional and skilled workers from the Andean region and the Southern Cone, represented as much as 6.3 percent of total immigrant inflow to Canada. While many of the Andean immigrants came from Ecuador, large numbers of immigrants from the Southern Cone were Chilean refugees who sought political asylum as a result of the brutal Pinochet regime (Darden & Kamel, 2000). Many of the newcomers from these two waves formed part of the “metropolitan middle classes”, which entailed both white- and blue-collar workers who earned low incomes but who aspired to the higher economic conditions of the upper classes (Mata, 1998, p. 172; Levitsky, 2003). Through the combination of revised federal immigration policies and perceived higher prospects for upward socio-economic mobility outside of Latin America, Canada received much larger numbers of Latin@ immigrants than it had in previous years (Mata, 1988).
The civil war that plagued much of Central America during the early 1980s propagated a fourth wave of Latin@ immigration to Canada - the Central American Wave (early 1980s and 1990s). Many of these migrants were members of the urban and rural lower classes fleeing civil unrest in countries like El Salvador, Nicaragua and Guatemala (Darden & Kamel, 2000; Simmons, 1993). Because of the Reagan administration’s right-wing involvement in the implementation of dictatorial regimes in Central America, many migrants perceived the United States as a less favourable target destination and instead chose to migrate to Canada (Basok, 1989). During this period the numbers of Latin@ immigrants, particularly from El Salvador, increased to almost 9 percent of the total number of newcomers to Canada, outnumbering the immigrants from Chile (Mata, 1988; Menjivar, 2000).

Latin American immigration to Canada has continued in steady numbers, and the slow (and sometimes negative) economic growth in the 1990s, particularly in Venezuela, Argentina, Colombia, and Mexico (Fraga, 2004), engendered what is known as either the Techno Wave (Mata, September 2011, personal communication) or the Professional Wave (Ginieniewicz, Schugurensky, & Infante, 2007). Unlike previous waves of immigration that resulted from oppressive regimes and high levels of poverty, this fifth wave of newcomers includes larger numbers of highly qualified “economic class” immigrants who are beginning to shift the socio-economic profile of Latin@s in Canada (Ginieniewicz, Schugurensky, & Infante, 2007; Yau, O’Reilly, Rosolen, & Archer, 2011).

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have laid out the debate concerning the uses and implications of the terms Hispanic and Latin@. Here, I have also outlined my position and choice to use the term
Latin@ in this Canadian-based dissertation, and have drawn upon topics of pan-ethnicity and transnationalism to make my point. In addition to providing an overview of the immigration trends that have made up the Latin@ presence in Canada, I have also described the Latin@ students in the TDSB.

Through a detailed description of the discourses surrounding the notion of the Latin@ in Canada, we can better understand the ways in which Latin@ youth engage with their latinidad and collaborate with each other as a collective of participatory action researchers committed to social justice and educational change in their communities. In the story that will unfold throughout this dissertation, I hope to present the ways in which a more illuminated understanding of latinidad and its relationships to YPAR also underscore the ways in which the youth’s collective clamoring for “access to the conversations, policies, theories, and spaces that are systematically denied to them informs and inspires their efforts” (Tuck et. al., 2008, p. 50). These efforts, which directly address the youth’s lived experiences as students and as Latin@s in Canada, comprise a transformative learning process that extends beyond the acquisition of content knowledge (Mezirow, 1981, 1994). To this end, I hope that the information gleaned from this dissertation will afford educators, researchers, and policy makers with a starting point to inform their own work with youth, Latin@ or otherwise.

Nevertheless, Proyecto Latin@ is a unique study that was carried out with a particular context and its own set of participant-researchers, circumstances, foci, and outcomes (see Gaztambide-Fernández, Guerrero, Rosas, & Guerrero, 2011; Guerrero, Gaztambide-Fernández, Rosas, & Guerrero, 2013). As a researcher who has been involved with Proyecto Latin@ since its inception in the Fall of 2008, I also leave my multiply-layered and personal “print” in the ways in which this story unfolds. How does my educational background inform my
understanding of the processes examined in this dissertation? Through what lens will I tell this story? In the chapter that follows, I will present my theoretical framework of transnational Latin@ feminism, which I have crafted through a fusion of theories of transnationalism and Latin@ feminism.
Chapter 2

The Theoretical Framework

At the heart of my dissertation work are the processes of self-identification as Latin@, community engagement, and transformative learning in the context of a secondary school-based YPAR project. Across both phases of Proyecto Latin@, the students addressed issues like language, gender, shifting transnational identities, and oppressive power structures. In many of these conversations, the youth described both their challenges related to these factors and their commitment to deconstructing the essentialist and deficit frames of thinking that cast them as a monolithic group with many shortcomings. As I have discussed in the previous chapter, latinidad in Canada is a highly diverse concept encompassing variances in immigration histories, socio-political backgrounds, generational status – and, as is becoming increasingly common, mixed parentage.

While I surveyed theories of transnationalism to address issues of diversity and hybridity, I reviewed theories of Latina feminism to address the sharing, agentic, and democratic aspects of the students’ YPAR work. While both sets of theories provided me with useful concepts through which to situate my work, I did find some shortcomings that require further attention. With respect to the theories of transnationalism, I noted that they were overly concentrated on two-nation models, oftentimes involving the United States and Mexico. Such two-nation conceptualizations of transnationalism, however, overlook the diverse possibilities of multinational and even multiple ethnoracial backgrounds. In the multicultural context of Canada, such considerations are relevant and important. In this chapter, then, I re-imagine these two-nation transnational theories and offer a hybrid theoretical framework that I call transnational
Latina feminism (TLF), which not only connects some of the key tenets of transnationalism and Latina feminism, but also provides me with the theoretical space through which to situate my Toronto-based study on my YPAR work with Latin@ youth.

In itself, the term transnational Latina feminism is not an entirely new one. In fact, I have encountered it online in a description of a conference paper authored by Nicole Guidotti Hernández. When I contacted her for details on what she meant by this term, she directed me to her 2011 book and indicated that it provided an in-depth explanation of the term. While I did not see the exact term transnational Latina (or Latin@) feminism when I read the book, I saw many instances of the terms transnational feminism and Latina feminism. Guidotti-Hernández employs these lenses to cast doubt on the often-romantic notions of solidarity in mestizaje discourses and to illustrate the complicity of both dominant and counter-narratives in the selective determination of violent acts in the historical record. Indeed, she explicitly states that her “book is not a narrative of resistance” but rather a means of calling out the racialized and gendered violence perpetuated by the Anglos (on the mestiz@ and the indigenous) and the mestiz@s (on the indigenous) in “contests over citizenship and resources” (Guidotti-Hernández, 2011, p. 3-4).

My conceptualization of TLF also follows Guidotti-Hernández' problematization of both resistance discourses and celebratory conceptualizations of mestizaje, both of which can obscure the power-related challenges that can accompany collaborative processes like YPAR. While I certainly also agree that such conversations require that Latin@s (read: those who self-identify as such) engage in examinations of their historical pasts and diversity, I also assert that an analysis of their own identifications, behaviours, and personal biases are necessary as well. For such

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24 The book’s title is Unspeakable Violence: Remapping U.S. and Mexican National Imaginaries. Please refer to the references list at the end of this dissertation for the bibliographic information.
reconstructive work and change to occur, however, it is crucial to engage in such conversations in democratic ways that incorporate not only shared stories, but also shared research and practice among all participants, regardless of their sex or gender identity. As Anzaldúa (1989) avers, it is not enough to stand on the opposite river bank, shouting questions, challenging patriarchal, white conventions … Because the counterstance stems from a problem with authority – outer as well as inner – it’s a step toward liberation from cultural domination. But it is not a way of life. At some point, on our way to a new consciousness, we will have to leave the opposite bank, the split between the two mortal combatants somehow healed so that we are on both shores at once, and at once, see through serpent and eagle’s eyes … The possibilities are numerous once we decide to act (p. 100 - 101).

Such moves towards a new and transformed consciousness in the urban Canadian context, however, require both the acknowledgement of the transnational Latin@ beyond the U.S.-Mexico imaginary that is often cited in the academic literature and the production of new knowledge through a democratic process of reflection, research, and practice. My theorization of transnational Latin@ feminism (TLF) then, is centred on the following three tenets:

1. TLF considers transnational latinidad as a fluid and contextual concept that extends beyond the two-nation model
2. TLF is a shared endeavour between Latin@ men, women, and everyone in between
3. Transnational Latin@ feminism is a democratic – but very complex – process of reflection, theorization, and action that seeks to transform oppressive practices and attitudes.

Because my TLF theoretical framework is woven from a combination of transnationalism and Latina feminist perspectives, I feel that it is necessary to clearly indicate both the useful and the not-so-useful components of each of those two lenses. For me, this step is necessary so that I
can clearly articulate how I have come to my TLF framework. I will then return to the three
tenets of TLF listed above and expand on each of them. Through this approach, I seek to further
discussion about the re/construction and negotiation of *latinidad* and the processes of inquiry,
collaboration, and transformative learning in the YPAR space of Proyecto Latin@.

**Theorizing Transnationalism**

In itself, the term *transnational* points to the notion of movement across and beyond both
physical and non-physical borders; these borders, then, are both real and imagined. Such
conceptions of border crossing between the homeland and the hostland open up the space to
dialogue about topics related to migration experiences and the ties that people have to both lands
(Blanc, Basch, & Schiller, 1995; Vertovec, 1999). These ties are maintained through a variety of
everyday processes that encompass social networks and the connections, communications, and
movements, which can and do include actions like travel to the homeland or any other location
related to the homeland, including restaurants, local businesses, and remittance kiosks. Such
cross-border actions and places illustrate the dynamic nature of ties to the homeland as well as
the creation of new and different social “home” spaces in the hostland (Portes, 1996; Saldivar,

Such overly broad conceptions of transnationalism, however, are essentializing and
assume that all transnational activities are similarly maintained by all parties involved in them.
As Guarnizo (1997) argues, studies on transnationalism also require a “from below” approach
that is centred on individuals and their social networks. Such an approach can serve as a valuable
avenue through which to understand the economic, political, and socio-cultural aspects of
transnationalism and their effects on the ways in which these individuals’ lives play out in and
between both countries to which they are connected. This combination of micro-, meso-, and macro-analyses of transnationalism, then, allows for a more nuanced understanding of the relationships between migratory movement, identity, and belonging (Allon & Anderson, 2009; Dunn, 2010).

Nonetheless, it is crucial to remember that experiences of transnationalism are in themselves fluid, and shaped not only by the bodies of individuals, but also by the social, economic, and political conditions of the nations they encounter (Conradson & Ladham, 2005). Such a nuanced insight into the different past and present experiences of migrants constitutes what Dunn (2010) terms an “embodied approach” to transnationalism (p. 1).

In the context of globalization and diaspora, it is also crucial to problematize narrow conceptions of transnationalism that focus solely on migrants and also consider the cross-border practices of the second and subsequent generations (Lee, 2011). As she puts it and as I have mentioned earlier in this chapter, transnational activity is not limited to physical border crossing. Indeed, such activities include practices that transcend borders, such as “contributing to family remittance pools and fundraising activities, [which keep these individuals] enmeshed in transnational webs of connection, both intradiasporic and with the homeland” (p. 295). This diasporic scope of transnationalism unites migrants and subsequent generations in acts of “ethno-communal consciousness and solidarity” (Gallego & Soto, 2009, p. 21) as they relate to their homeland and their common histories (Cohen, 1997).

With the widespread availability of technology and communications, transnational cultural consumption and reproduction become especially accessible. Sánchez and Machado-Casas (2009) engage in a conversation about cross-generational transnationalism through its discussion of the practices of 2\textsuperscript{nd} generation Mexicans in the United States who watch Spanish-
language movies and *telenovelas*. Such activities not only expand the Spanish language proficiency of these 2\textsuperscript{nd} generation Mexicans, but also serve as linguistic capital in their interactions with their family members as well as with other forms of Spanish-language media and communications. An abundant body of research on Latin@ transnationalism focuses on activities and relationships between Mexico and the United States, particularly making reference to crossing the 3,000 mile border between the two countries, whether physically or through the imaginary (e.g., Sánchez, 2010; Smith, 2006). A sizeable body of research also exists for transnational relationships between the U.S. and other polities in the Spanish speaking Caribbean, including Puerto Rico (e.g., Duany, 2005; Roth, 2009), the Dominican Republic (e.g., Roth, 2009), and Cuba (e.g., Fernandes, 2003, 2005; Smith & Eade, 2008). Indeed, this body of scholarly literature also reflects the fact that these national groups, which include people with Mexican, Puerto Rican, Dominican, and Cuban roots, also represent the largest populations of Latin@s in the continental United States.

This two-nation model, however, overlooks several realities present in the lives of some who do self-identify as Latin@. Firstly, this two-nation model is a narrow oversimplification not only of the demographic makeup of people in Latin America, but also of Latin Americans’ interactions and relationships with others in the hostland. In fact, the demographic data of some of the Proyecto Latin@ participants contradict such assumptions and capture diverse histories of immigration to Latin America from countries like Italy and Lebanon.

In his study on second-generation Hindustanis in the Netherlands, Gowricharn (2009) makes similar points on the complexities of transnationalism. In his statistical analysis of over 950 surveys administered to Dutch Hindustanis – who are the descendants of workers who migrated to Surinam from India – he found high incidences of transnational activities that tied
them to their Indian roots. These cultural ties included fluency in the Hindustani language (51 percent) as well as the regular consumption of Indian music (84 percent). While Gowricharn (2009) acknowledges the prevalence of Bollywood culture among diasporic Indian groups as a factor influencing this regular consumption, his work points to a major gap in the abundant literature on transnationalism, which The second generation’s regular consumption of Bollywood culture – which includes film, dance, and fashion – also figured prominently into transnational activity with India. The complexity of such activity also departs from the abundant literature on transnationalism, which centres on a two-nation perspective and ignores multiple layers and histories of immigration. Through such “analytical orientation shifts, new forms of transnationalism come into focus” (Gowricharn, 2009, p. 1621) and serve as a useful lens through which to conceptualize the transnationalism of Latin@s, particularly in the multicultural context of 21st century Canada.

When it comes to conceptions of Latin@ transnationalism among a group, Guzmán and Valdivia (2004) point out that a wide range of representations exist within *latinidad*. Indeed, the notion of Latin@ transnationalism engages with both the diversities and similarities between Latin@s and the interrelationships between these differences and similarities. This process of engaging with Latin@ transnationalism also opens up the space for critical intra- and inter-group conversations. These conversations in turn which provide the opportunities for unity between individuals and groups that identify as Latin@ as well as the recognition and the embracing of the multiple dimensions and nuances of *latinidad*, including issues of (im)migration, race/ethnicity, and language (Trucio-Haynes, 2001; Váldes, 2005; Villalpando, 2004).

Such transnational unity also yields opportunities for activist acts of solidarity with the potential to move toward social justice (Yosso, 2005). As I have mentioned earlier in this
dissertation and as a robust body of academic literature points out, Latin@ youth have been subjected to multiple layers of systemic oppression that have led to disproportionately high rates of academic underachievement. While this group is highly diverse both in terms of their latinidades and their schooling experiences, the acts of uniting with to collectively subvert oppressive conditions opens up the possibilities for engaging in meaningful and participatory work. In the context of this dissertation, such work with and by Latin@ youth materialized through YPAR, which entailed reflective conversations on personal lived experiences with marginalization and discrimination and their work towards change.

**Latin@ Feminism**

Latin@ feminism is in itself a hybrid theory drawing upon activist traditions such as Latin@ critical race theory (LatCrit)\(^\text{25}\) and women of colour feminism\(^\text{26}\). At the heart of this hybrid and activist theorization is critical examination of the multiple factors that interact with gender, including race, ethnicity, social class, and even political background. These critical examinations also examine the various tensions that can arise between agency and the social constructions that continue to position Latin@ women as hyper-sexualized and doltish beings who are inferior to men. Latin@ feminism, then, requires a rethinking of such prevalent binaries and the decolonizing act of re/constructing the Latin@ woman imaginary (Perez, 1999).

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\(^{25}\) LatCrit borrows from and makes important “points of convergence” (Hernandez-Truyol, 1994, p. 324) with critical race theory (CRT) by examining issues of race and marginalization that challenge Latin@s in particular. For example, LatCrit takes up the multiple layers of racism encountered by Latin@s (such as but not limited to race/ethnicity, (im)migration, phenotype, and language) that CRT does not (Villalpando, 2003). In addressing the legacy of Spanish colonialism and androcentrism in the Americas as well as U.S. imperialism which has manifested and continues to manifest itself through various systems of oppression that have become so enmeshed as “normal” (Hernández-Truyol, 1997), LatCrit also creates a space for “a coalitional progressive Latin@ pan-ethnicity” (Villalpando, 2003, p. 622). Another key feature of LatCrit is its interrogation of the black-white binary, which not only excludes Latin@s, but also overlooks the complicated and multiple layers of racism experienced by Latina/os (Pulido, 2008).

\(^{26}\) See, for instance, Mohanty (2003).
Below, I list the three tenets of Latin@ feminist theory that I find most useful for my study. I will describe each of these three tenets in more detail after the following list:

1. the central role of *testimonio* (storytelling) in the sharing of experiences and the calling out of oppressive structures and practices
2. the contestation of essentialist and dualistic imaginaries that cast Latin@ women as inferior to their male counterparts
3. the emphasis on solidarity and shared responsibility in rupturing with the various forms of systemic violence that continue to affect the lives of both Latin@ women and men (Arrizón, 2006; Delgado Bernal, Elenes, Godinez, & Villenas, 2006; Hurtado, 2003).

The first tenet that I discuss here is that of the *testimonio*. Like LatCrit, Latin@ feminism privileges the minority voices from the standpoint of common and intertwined histories of oppression as a means of exposing and contesting the coloured nuances of society (Barnes, 1990; Delgado, 1989; Villenas, 2001, 2007). Indeed, this sharing of experiences is in itself a “pedagogy of solidarity” (Villenas, 2007) that incorporates the storytellers’ knowledge and experiences in the quest to contest exclusion and marginalization (Delgado Bernal, Elenes, Godinez, & Villenas, 2006). Valencia (2010) adds that the *testimonio* is a collective process that:

raises very different methodological discussions around the construction of knowledge and the repositioning of power … Latino testimonio serves a purpose of self and group preservation by naming a collective story. In other words, by sharing a story of struggle, survival and success, [a] collective story of marginalization is centred (p. 111).

Such sharing of stories was a central component throughout both phases of Proyecto Latin@. The *testimonios* of the students in the first phase, which took place through the individual interviews as well as in the focus groups, revealed stories of struggle that collectively
created a larger voice that was shared to a larger audience in a report that garnered media attention in Canada and even in the United States.\textsuperscript{27} These testimonios and the recommendations that the students expressed not only revealed their educational challenges as Latin@ youth in Toronto public high schools but also paved the way to the YPAR phase of the project, which is the focus of this dissertation.

The second tenet of Latin@ feminism that I will discuss here is the activist dismantling of the binary modes of thinking that posit Latin@ women as the oppressed “other” (Anzaldúa, 1987). While the varying layers of gender, ethnoracial, and systemic oppression that Latin@ women have historically encountered – and continue to encounter – certainly require contestation, it does not suffice to merely describe them. For emancipatory change to take place, it is necessary to engage in courageous conversations that lead to what Anzaldúa (1987) calls “a new mythos.” She indicates that:

By creating a new mythos - that is, a change in the way we perceive reality, the way we see ourselves, and the ways we behave - la mestiza creates a new consciousness. The work of mestiza consciousness is to break down the subject/object duality that keeps her prisoner and to show in the flesh and through the images in her work how duality is transcended. The answer to the problem between the white race and the colored, between males and females, lies in healing the split that originates in the very foundation of our lives, our culture, our languages, our thoughts. A massive uprooting of dualistic thinking in the individual and collective consciousness is the beginning of a long struggle, but one that could, in our best hopes, bring us to the end of rape, of violence, of war (p. 102).

\textsuperscript{27} This U.S. coverage can be found online at: http://latino.foxnews.com/latino/lifestyle/2012/02/02/latinos-drop-toronto-schools/
This is not to say, however, that such re/constructive and decolonizing discourses only move away from the dichotomous “us vs. them” ideologies and bury the colonial past. In fact, Latin@ feminism necessitates taking up the colonial past, but in ways that take on what Blackwell (2011) terms “retrofitted memory.” This “retrofitted memory” integrates “fragments of older histories that have been disjunctured by colonial practices of organizing historical knowledge or by masculinist renderings of history that disappear women’s political involvement in order to create space for women in historical traditions that erase them” (p. 2). Such re/telling re/creates the voices, experiences, and contributions of Latin@ women allows them to reclaim their social, political, and historical space and to engage in new conversations that move them forward.

The re/constructive self-analysis that Anzaldúa proposes along with the creation of the counter-narratives that Blackwell describes are certainly pertinent in this study on YPAR; these pertinent Latin@ feminist approaches both places the perspectives, stories, and counter-stories of Latin@ youth at the “center of analysis” (Fernández, 2002, p. 46). Additionally, they illuminate our awareness and understanding of the marginalization that permeates their lives. In turn, these approaches allow for the theorization of the experiences of Latin@ youth in ways that centre their voices. This focus on the voices of the youth is an especially important endeavor given that they “are often the objects of our educational research and yet are often absent from or silenced within this discourse” (Fernández, 2002, p. 46).

This counter-narrative tenet of Latin@ feminism also aligns well with the YPAR context of my study because it also creates the space for the youth to freely elucidate how White
supremacy has created and maintained its oppressive culture of poverty\textsuperscript{28} perspective towards them. On a wider scale, the opportunities that YPAR creates for establishing as well as nurturing alliances with adults and community members helps to further spread activism aimed at ameliorating the educational experiences of Latin@ youth. Such alliances further strengthen the youth’s pro/active consciousness as Latin@s who engage in collaborative work that aims to achieve more equitable social and educational conditions.

With the dismantling of dichotomous modes of thinking and agency comes the third tenet of Latin@ feminism that I take up here, which regards solidarity as a post-colonial project that recognizes differences between and within different communities while working towards a common goal (Mohanty, 2003; Villenas, 2006). Latin@ feminism also recognizes that mainstream feminism privileges white middle class interests and obscures the particular struggles that racialized women face because of factors such as class, race/ethnicity, and language. Latina feminism also extends beyond the transnational contexts of the U.S. Latin@ population and forges solidarity with other women of colour, be they in the United States, in Latin America, and abroad (Villenas, 2006).

In these relationships of intersectional and transnational solidarity (Ferguson, 2009, hooks, 1984), Latin@s engage in anti-racist projects of decolonization that moves feminism in ways that create as well as nurture coalitions that cut across boundaries of nation, legal status, legal status, 

\textsuperscript{28} The culture of poverty perspective, forwarded by U.S. anthropologist Oscar Lewis in the late 1950s, posits that culture is an inherent feature of people and the “cultural” group they belong to. A culture’s development and positioning in the social hierarchy is contingent, to quote the words of Oscar Lewis, on its placement within a “fourfold system of classification [that considers its] relationship between [its people] and the larger community, the nature of the community, the nature of the family, and the attitudes, values, and the character structure of the individual” (Lewis, 1966, cited in Eames & Goode, 1970, p. 480). The combination of these traits results in varying levels of cultural achievement and degree of integration within mainstream society. Because of such oppressive stereotyping, it is not uncommon for educators to categorize Latina/os as scholastic underachievers who come from families that do not value education (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001). I can say that such perspectives do continue to exist, as I have had my teacher colleagues personally tell me that her Latina/o students were not faring as well as others because “it’s in their culture.”
language, ethnicity, race, and social class (Pérez, 1999; Mohanty, 2003; Villenas, 2006). For Villenas, solidarity constitutes a highly personal endeavor that is fostered through “women’s kin stories … and how the postcolonial conditions of persisting cultural, political, and economic domination … are brought together across time and space” (p. 662). Such conceptualizations of Latin@ feminism not only consider the acts of solidarity across latinidades, but also across various bodies, both physical human bodies and organizational entities. This notion of cross-cultural and cross-organizational collaboration is indeed a key component to the action processes of YPAR that seek to enact change.

While various scholars engage with feminist theories as theories of sisterhoods, others have pointed out that relationships of feminist solidarity are not exclusive to women (Hurtado & Sinha, 2008; White, 2008). Indeed, feminism requires that both men and women become cognizant of how hegemonic notions of masculinity dichotomize both groups in ways that privilege the former and oppress the latter (Connell, 1995; Hurtado & Sinha, 2008). As I pointed out with Anzaldúa’s words above, Latin@ feminism requires a new mestiz@ consciousness which requires inner and outer dialogues challenging the hegemonic ideologies and practices that have been ingrained in the imaginaries of both Latin@ women and men for too long. As Hernández-Truyol (1997) points out, Latin@ women continue to be viewed as:

- dependent, submissive, sentimental, seductive, pretty, maternal, flirtatious, unstable,
- impulsive, soft, sweet, intuitive, cowardly, insecure, passive, resigned, envious, weeping,
- modest, faithful, homey, and hysterical. From a Latina-feminist perspective, these
gender-role caricatures, so firmly ingrained in culture that their mythical character has
transmogrified into absolute tradition and truths, are virtually impenetrable barriers
preventing any deconstruction of cultural gender roles … [which] is a frontera (barrier) in the way of Latinas’ attainment of respeto and equality in any society (p. 915).

Like their male counterparts, the ethno-racial and linguistic background of Latin@ females “others” them in the public white sphere. A transnational Latin@ feminist lens challenges the sexist, racist, and essentialist racist Western imperialist notions of latinidad and construes them as “untenable” (Valdivia, 2004, p. 219). Nonetheless, Latin@ women still must contend with power structures that impose a gendered familismo within their own Latin@ communities that dictate how they ought to be and act in order to garner el respeto (Graham, 2010; Sabogal et. al., 1987).

Of course, such work is a major undertaking that is easier said than done, and requires more than the mere acknowledgement of the tensions between people’s oppressive attitudes and their desire to rupture with their own complicity in such oppression. Nonetheless, such conversations open up the space to move towards feminist practices and solidarities that negotiate terrains of difference and similarities through time, space, and multiple identities. Moreover, doing away with oppressive and dualistic frames of thinking also require the perspectives and consideration of not just men and women, but also people who are what Hicks (2011) calls “both/and” , people of different gender identities. It is through such a standpoint that I arrive at the hybridized feminist theory that I call transnational Latin@ feminism.

**Transnational Latin@ Feminism**

In this chapter so far, I have analyzed theories of transnationalism and Latin@ feminism so as to lay out both the useful and the not so useful components for my study. The resulting synthesis has also led me to bring out a hybrid perspective that I call transnational Latin@
feminism. This hybrid theoretical framework provides for new and different ways of seeing latinidad, solidarity, and activism, which are in turn useful for this particular YPAR study on Latin@ youth in an urban Canadian school setting.

Here, I return to the three tenets of TLF that I have constructed and delineated at the beginning of this chapter so that I can recapitulate each of them prior to moving on to the methodology chapter that will follow.

1. **TLF considers transnational latinidad as a fluid and contextual concept that extends beyond the two-nation model.** Indeed, the above tenet is critical to conceptualizations of *latinidad* not only in this dissertation but also in the increasingly diverse context of Canada. As I have previously mentioned in numerous instances in this dissertation, the Proyecto Latin@ data reveals a wide range of national, racial/ethnic, and even linguistic backgrounds among the student participants, both immigrant and Canadian-born. Such diversity includes students whose parents were both born in the same Latin American country and those whose parents were born in different Latin American countries. Within the genealogical and migration histories of these students and/or their families are ties that extend to other parts of the world, including Italy, Lebanon, and Palestine. Such ties serve as a means of demystifying commonly held perceptions of Latin@s as a group with a static mestiz@ lineage that encompasses long-ago intermixing between Indigenous peoples and the Spanish.

Such diversity in terms of lineage and migration history became even more apparent among the second-generation students in the project and reflected a shifting inter-racial/ethnic demographic in their being as Latin@s. While a review of the student intake data and their narratives on their national, racial/ethnic backgrounds increased my awareness of the diversity of *latinidad* in Canada, my own lived experiences and self-identifications also shape my
recognition of such circumstances. As a Canadian-born woman whose parents were both born in Ecuador, I self-identify as a second-generation Latin@. I also identify as a mother to a 6 year old who is cognizant of – and who openly acknowledges – her own mixed background. Isabel self-identifies as a Latin@ through her relationships with my family and as Romanian through her father, who is a Romanian-Hungarian immigrant. Here, I will also say that social interactions are crucial in shaping her self-identifications. While her *latinidad* is shaped through the close relationships that she has with my family members and the vast amounts of time that she spends with them, her Romanian identity is shaped by her interactions with her father’s family and the cultural activities in which she partakes, including reading children’s stories in Romanian.

A clear example of Isabel’s mixed yet shifting identifications occurred during a recent visit to my mother in law’s home. In the kitchen there was a magnet with red words that said “Romanian Kitchen.” She picked up the magnet and said to me: “Mommy, you can’t come in here. Only Daddy, Lela (her grandmother Daniela) and me. Not you.” While we all burst out laughing, what was apparent was that Isabel self-identified as Romanian in that space and place. In that moment, her *latinidad* had taken a back seat to her Romanian-ness and her sense of belonging to the majority, who were her Romanian relatives. Adding to such complexity in Isabel’s *latinidad* is her recent acknowledgement of her Hungarian background, which had been largely absent in the past with the exception of her surname. While this surname had been her only previous acknowledgement of this lineage, the friendships that she has recently formed with a group of Hungarian girls at her school has led her to take an increased interest in learning more about and embodying her Hungarian-ness. Such circumstances point to the very notion that social interactions and contexts play major roles in how people self-identify (trans)nationally, ethnically, and even racially.
These examples bring me to my reiteration that *latinidad* is conceptualized in different ways by different people and according to their social contexts. As I discussed earlier in this chapter in the section on transnationalism, *transnational latinidad* is always in flux and negotiated according to the circumstances at hand. This self-identification aspect, which involves *transnational latinidad*, will be discussed in further detail in the fourth chapter in this dissertation. Here, I want to move on to the next tenet of TLF, which takes up the question of how this self-identification becomes a starting point from which to engage in difficult conversations about how gendered acts and complicity in these acts – whether conscious or unconscious – perpetuate patriarchal structures of oppression and require shared responsibility in combatting them.

Such dialogues are particularly crucial to the YPAR context of Proyecto Latin@, not only because it involved the convergence of a diverse group of youth who self-identified as Latin@, but also because the action-oriented underpinnings of the work required open and collective dialogue on power asymmetries, including those within the group itself. As I will discuss in the section that follows, such conversations demand not only personal reflection, but also shared responsibility in actively working towards social and educational justice.

### 2. TLF is a shared endeavour between Latin@ men, women, and everyone in-between.

As I have pointed out earlier in this chapter, feminism necessitates shared responsibility between men and women in recognizing not only the oppressions that face them but also their complicity – both conscious and unconscious – in embodying hegemonic notions of masculinity that perpetuate power asymmetries. In an attempt to rupture with binaries and to further engage in conversations about hybridity, I also want to address TLF as an endeavour that not only involves men and women, but also children and people of all gender identities. While I
understand that dialogues about feminism and Latina feminism tend to directly address the
dichotomies between men and women, I also contend that it is necessary to also consider how
the experiences of transgendered and inter-sex people have also been impacted by such binary
frames of thinking. What also needs to be addressed is that such dichotomous perspectives
bombard people from a very early age and through various agents of socialization, including the
family, schools, and the mass media, which is a capitalist entity that markets and reinforces
gendered roles and consumer behaviours (Dávila, 2012)

Here, I will also reiterate that transnational Latin@ feminist conversations about gender
also encompass interconnecting topics of race/ethnicity and requires that everyone involved
shares the responsibility of reflecting upon their own complicity in perpetuating oppressive
hyper-heteronormative attitudes and practices. Nonetheless, simply reflecting upon and naming
one’s lived experiences with oppression and one’s own complicity in perpetuating oppressive
hyper-heteronormative attitudes and practices do not suffice in the quest to achieve a more
equitable world. Indeed, deep transnational Latin@ feminist dialogue encompasses “courageous
conversations” (Singleton & Linton, 2006) addressing the factors shaping lived experiences and
social contexts. Such conversations, however, can be difficult not only because they demand the
acknowledgement of one’s complicity in perpetuating power asymmetries but also the yielding
of this complicity during these conversations and in future actions.

This multiply-layered and shared process of dialoguing and collective action, however,
requires respectful and democratic courses of action in critically addressing the multiple layers of
discrimination, hegemonic ideologies as well as their implications in the lives of the youth in the
Proyecto Latin@ YPAR course. Such critical undertakings yield ample possibilities in fostering
critical consciousness and the development of the tools to take TLF further and implement action plans for social and educational justice.

3. Transnational Latin@ feminism is a democratic – but very complex – process of reflection, theorization, and action that seeks to transform oppressive practices and attitudes. TLF is a personal and political project in which one’s own subjectivities become closely examined and redefined (Cahill, 2007). Inherent to the above tenet on TLF as a shared endeavour are the democratic and reflective practices through which it occurs. Indeed, such collective sharing in this genre of participatory social justice work requires dialogue that seeks to increase understanding of the issues impacting the lived experiences of the group’s members.

For this theorization to engender transformative practice, however, it is necessary to engage in collaborative plans of action that both position the group members at the “center of analysis” (Fernández, 2002, p. 46) while creating opportunities for the development and application of the learning and knowledge that is co-produced. In addition to the critical consciousness that such collective dialogue can generate, TLF presents vast opportunities for a praxis that has the potential to shift everyday practice and transform its practitioners both personally and socially. Throughout such experiential learning processes, then, practitioners of TLF openly engage in explicit dialogues about their concerns while building capacity among themselves and those with whom they share their new knowledge. Such knowledge sharing is crucial in projects of decolonization that seek to shift the attitudes and practices that contribute to the oppression of Latin@s.

Such sharing and capacity building also involves leadership and the further co-creation of knowledge with others, including the next generation of Latin@s. As I had delineated in the previous section in this chapter, attitudes and practices involving various factors in peoples’
lives, including gender roles, are learned through socialization and the environments in which it occurs. The continued co-creation of knowledge that TLF calls for, then, becomes an embodied and shared process of decolonization that extends across different domains, including schooling and the family.

This embodiment of TLF and the capacity building opportunities that it can present are closely tied to the aims of YPAR work. As indicated in the Proyecto Latin@ ethics protocol, a key aim of such work was to engage the students in “explor[ing] the issues they deem relevant to their schooling experiences … [so that they can] work towards meaningful personal and educational activism” (Gaztambide-Fernández & Guerrero, 2011, p. 4). Indeed, such meaningful and personal work is reminiscent of Cahill’s (2007) contention that “the personal is political.” Through a collective engagement of transnational Latin@ feminist theories that encompass topics of race, ethnicity, gender, language, and the ways in which they intersect in their daily lives, the youth in Proyecto Latin@ can examine “the fluidity and multiplicity of [their] subject positions as the basis for personal (and social) transformation” (Cahill, 2007, p. 268). Such examinations become liberatory acts of TLF when they are taken up in ways that underscore the ways in which “subjects ‘become’ (that is, how they shift and create new identities for themselves despite the seemingly hegemonic power of dominant discourses and governmental practices)” (Gibson, 2001, p. 641).

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have taken up theories of transnationalism and Latina feminism as places from which to consider my research on the processes of self-identification, community engagement, and transformative learning in the space of the Proyecto Latin@ study, particularly that from the YPAR phase. While there were many useful points from which to inform my work,
there were also numerous voids that necessitated addressing in order to theorize the increasingly diverse *latinidades* present not only in the urban Toronto context of Proyecto Latin@, but also across an increasingly multicultural Canada.

To accomplish such a task, I combined the pertinent components of transnationalism and Latina feminism to articulate what I call *transnational Latin@ feminism*. Through this theoretical framework, I moved away from the prevalent two-nation discourses of Latin@ transnationalism and engaged with a three-tenet conversation on multiple, shifting, and fluid *latinidades* and the ways in which they figure into agentic processes involved in participatory social justice work. Such perspectives are particularly relevant to the YPAR work of Proyecto Latin@ and speak not only to the diversity of experiences and backgrounds of the students, but also to the vast possibilities for rich and sometimes difficult conversations and plans of action that seek to enact change.
Chapter 3

Doing YPAR in Proyecto Latin@: The methodology

In the last chapter, I delineated the theoretical framework of transnational Latin@ feminism and have made numerous references to its relevance to YPAR. Here in this chapter, I will engage in a methodological discussion on how YPAR came about in Proyecto Latin@. I will begin by addressing the key issues and tenets underlying our work with the youth, which materialized as a senior social science credit course. This school credit-based format, however, created specific methodological quandaries involving not only the process itself but also the collisions between my multiple positionalities as a graduate researcher and TDSB teacher writing a dissertation on Proyecto Latin@. This chapter, then, is the story of how YPAR was done in Proyecto Latin@’s school credit-based format and the challenges that came along throughout this journey.

What is YPAR?

What is YPAR and where does it come from? YPAR is the youth-centred form of PAR, which is described in the academic literature as an applied research methodology, or rather, a set of applied research methodologies that differ from traditional academic research approaches through its emphasis on the knowledge and experiences of marginalized groups of people (Cahill, 2007; Nelson, Ochocka, Griffin, & Lord, 1998). In contrast to positivist research methodologies in which the academic researcher holds a privileged position of expertise and power, PAR is a collaborative and community-based process in which the participants are also the researchers. PAR work, then, comprises research conducted by and for the subject-
researchers, who actively share in designing and implementing the research questions, methodologies, and action plans (Frisby, Maguire, & Reid, 2009; Torre, 2009).

Through the processes of community-building, knowledge production, analysis, and action, PAR challenges traditional notions of what it means to do research. Unlike orthodox research methodologies, which involve the entry of privileged academics into social settings that they are often not a part of, PAR situates the subjects as researchers whose sites of inquiry are their own lived experiences and social environments. PAR entails an evolving and iterative process in which two elements are interdependent and at its core: participation and the collective two-fold pursuit of understanding the roots of marginalization and social change (Ferreyra, 2006; Freire, 1972; Hall, 1993). Through such dialogic collaboration in coming to critically understand the sources of oppression, PAR subject-researchers can “liberate themselves” (Freire, 1972) and engage in informed decision-making that will lead to change (Carr & Kemmis, 1986).

**YPAR in Scholarly Literature**

In recent years, participatory action research with youth (YPAR) has been employed as a way of building the potential of youth to engage in action towards change in their schools and communities (Irizarry, 2009; Ozer, Ritterman, & Wanis, 2010). Many of these projects have engaged youth with issues of marginalization at school (e.g., Torre & Fine, 2008), particularly with respect to discrimination and poverty (e.g., Morrell, 2007; Brown & Rodríguez, 2009), and even through school-credit programs (Cammarota, 2008; Guerrero, Gaztambide-Fernández, Rosas, & Guerrero, 2013). YPAR initiatives have also been implemented to address other community issues such as sex education (e.g., Flicker & Guta, 2008; Maglajlic et. al., 2004), homelessness (e.g., de Winter & Noom, 2003, Walters & East, 2001), substance abuse (e.g.,
Coupland et al., 2005, Holleran, Reeves, Dustman, & Marsiglia, 2002), and civic participation (e.g., Jupp, 2007, Kirschner, 2008).

Documenting their work with youth in New York City, Torre, Fine, Stoudt, and Fox (2013) state that YPAR constitutes an epistemology grounded in social justice and participation that draws upon critical theories that include frameworks such as feminism, critical race, neo-Marxism, indigenous knowledge, and post-structuralism. While the research design and implementation components inherent in YPAR constitute forms of methodology, the critical skills and knowledge that emerge from engaging in the various stages of these endeavours extend the work beyond technical “know-how.” In a sense, YPAR creates a new transformative way of knowing that blends together “social movements and public science ... [to] document the grossly uneven structural distributions of opportunities, resources and dignity [and rupture the] ideological categories projected onto communities (delinquent, at risk, damaged, innocent, victim)” (p. 2).

These ideological categories are even more salient for youth, as they are particularly prone to assumptions about their research capabilities and to what Ozer, Ritterman, and Wanis (2010) refer to as the “diminished power of youth in adult-supervised settings” (p. 153). While youth experiences of marginalization can vary because of individual factors like gender identity, race/ethnicity, language, sexual orientation, and immigration status, as a whole they are subjected to “adultism”, which precludes them from providing their direct input on the decisions and policies that affect them. This additional challenge, which entails the positionality of youths as one category and adults as another, often perpetuates power imbalances in which the former yield more authority and power to the latter based on age differences (Fletcher & Vavrus, 2006; Nishad, 2011). These hierarchies can sometimes become even more salient through the
scaffolding that the adults provide as they guide the youth through the theory and research necessary to do YPAR work.

As we shall see in the data analysis chapters, there have been multiple instances in which the youth-researchers deferred tasks such as making important decisions to the adult facilitators. In a small group conversation at the end of the YPAR course, for example, one student shared her initial discomfort at her newfound opportunities to engage in tasks that were widely perceived to fall to the teacher, such as determining the syllabus design and the course marks breakdown. For her, the abilities to participate in such undertakings were “bien raro (very strange)” and that she “nunca tuve la oportunidad [de] elegir como ser evaluada (never had the opportunity to choose how to be graded).” Student apprehensions like the ones mentioned above were indicative of the widespread (and colonialist) beliefs regarding the hierarchical relationships between educators and their students that positioned the former as the authoritative purveyor of knowledge and the latter as the recipients of this knowledge. This perspective reflects Freire’s notion of what he terms the “banking method of education, … [in which] the teacher knows everything … and enforces his choice, … and the students know nothing … and comply” (1972, p. 73).

Engaging in open conversations about the binaries in the age-based power dynamics that played out in the Proyecto Latin@ course was critical in thinking about everyone’s multiple positionalities and in turn promote higher levels of understanding and partnership among the group at every stage of YPAR work (Torre, 2009). Through the recognition and “working with” differences, contexts of horizontal power sharing and decision making can yield an “in-between-ness” that is productive and accessible to all (Cahill, 2004; Hopkins, 2007; Pratt et. al., 2007; Nast, 1994). Thus YPAR becomes a youth-centred process in which the adults relinquish their
roles as experts and authorities so that they can embark in genuinely horizontal relationships of collegiality (Brown & Rodríguez, 2009; Fals-Borda, 2001). In these alliances, then, it is important for the adults to also remain cognizant of and honour the interests, concerns, and developmental needs of their youth colleagues. This relationship of reciprocity requires that the adults communicate with their youth co-researchers in accessible language, trust them to take control over their work, and very importantly, promote their leadership and engagement throughout the YPAR process (Cammarota, 2009; Ozer, Ritterman, & Wanis, 2010; Torre, 2011). This quest towards the building and nurturing of horizontal power relationships, however, does require some careful balancing, particularly because of the socially constructed and the institutional expectations of both the adults and the youth involved in the work. While this balancing act is by no means an easy task, there are vast possibilities for both the adults and the youth in terms of the new alliances and advocacy for social change that can emerge through their partnership (Fletcher & Vavrus, 2006).

**Writing a Dissertation on YPAR: A Practice with/in and not with/in Research Norms**

What are the implications of writing a dissertation on YPAR, which is research centred on and led by the youth? How do I honour what Lather (1991) terms the “transformative agenda” of a project that sought to embody the students’ research of a way for them to understand and challenge the asymmetrical power dynamics and unequal distribution of resources that impact their lived experiences as Latin@ youth (p. 51)? How do I cope with the fears – and, perhaps even the accusations – that my dissertation is a co-optation and a twisted interpretation of the students’ voices? How do I cope with such fears when writing a dissertation that seeks to answer
questions on the students’ conceptions and negotiation of their *latinidad*, community engagement, and transformative learning?

While I continue to grapple with such questions, I do acknowledge that no research can be completely neutral (see Hall, 1975). As documented in various instances throughout my dissertation, I played an active part of Proyecto Latin@ through my various identities, including those of Latin@, graduate student researcher, and teacher. My contributions to the work, like those of the other adult researchers, helped guide the students as they engaged in dialogues that built their understanding of the world around them as well as the action plans to implement change. Yet at the same time, my commitment as a YPAR practitioner also facilitated my desire – and actions – to place the students’ voices at the forefront of this thesis. Even though I was a participant in many of these discussions, whether as a facilitator or as a present body, it was the students’ voices and collective theorizing that formed the data foundation for my theoretical framework of transnational Latin@ feminism (Kushner & Norris, 1980; Tuck et. al., 2008).

Despite the dialogic means of doing this work, however, I cannot help but think about how the very act of writing this dissertation – a dissertation about a youth-centred project – also signals an open-ended and double(d) practice of “doing research” and “troubling it” at the same time (Lather, 2012, p. 38). While on the one hand I am authoring a dissertation based on research that has been approved by Ethics Review Boards (ERBs) and by my thesis committee, on the other hand this very same research is based on youth-led work, which in itself challenges the commonly held and positivist ideologies about who does social science inquiry and the means through which they do it. While I cannot completely work through all these quandaries, I nonetheless contend that YPAR – in this case, in its transnational Latin@ feminist form – constituted the most appropriate means through which to honour the students’ desires to engage
in youth-led research in the Proyecto Latin@ course. When I think about the multiple stories and experiences of students that I have interacted with as a teacher and as a researcher, YPAR comes to mind as a viable method through which the youth can engage in social justice oriented work that is focused on them and conducted by them. Whether through everyday conversations with me or through their participation in Proyecto Latin@, the students shared their experiences as Latin@ youth in Toronto schools and were keen on providing their ideas for change. When the research team shared the results of their findings at the end of the first phase, the students stressed that they wanted their voices to be taken a step further and into participatory projects of social and educational activism. Indeed, as Guishard (2009) points out, YPAR assist[s] young people in nurturing their own political consciousness, while working as youth researchers [and raises critical awareness] that details empirically how people affected by multiple oppressions navigate their disadvantages, while battling an acute awareness of systemic injustice, a burgeoning sense of empowerment, feelings of betrayal, and hope (p. 86).

In Proyecto Latin@’s school-based context, the infusion of PAR as the way of carrying out the course provided not only a student-centred focus on developing research skills, but also the opportunities to collaboratively reflect and “participate in their own movement toward achieving equity in educational opportunities” (Guishard, 2009, p. 86). This movement, which the students themselves directed, was key to the development of their critical consciousness and action on the issues that affected them as members of the one of the most marginalized groups in the Toronto public school system.
The Key Tenets of YPAR in Proyecto Latin@

While each YPAR project is unique by virtue of its focus, circumstances, and methods, there are numerous principles that must be upheld so that the work truly comprises a research endeavour that is youth-friendly, youth-centred, participatory, and action-oriented (Gaztambide-Fernández, Guerrero, Rosas, & Guerrero, 2011; McHugh & Kowalski, 2009; Torre, 2009). Informed by a review of YPAR literature as well as by my reflections of the Proyecto Latin@ course, I have compiled the following list of what I deem guiding principles for doing YPAR work:

1) YPAR is action-oriented and critical work enacted in the best interests of youth. In other words, the youth collaborate in deciding the direction of their work;

2) YPAR values youth knowledge about their lived experiences and opens up critical community space for them to critically examine issues of oppression;

3) Youth possess the capacity to become critical researchers and public speakers who actively organize for change;

4) YPAR is a critical “pedagogy for empowerment” that opens up vast possibilities for transformative growth at the personal, community, and institutional level (Canella, 2008), and,

5) YPAR is a reflective process in which all participants critically examine their roles and contributions in the work.

Each of these key tenets is described in further detail below.

1. YPAR is action-oriented and critical work enacted in the best interests of youth.

In other words, the youth collaborate in deciding the direction of their work. YPAR regards youth as its most important stakeholders. While the adults doing this work serve as valuable
supports in implementing the aims and goals of their youth colleagues, their responsibilities also require reciprocity and transparency. This openness helps to foment mutually respectful partnerships that provide spaces of encouragement and inclusion of youth input through every stage of YPAR work (Maglaglic, 2004; Petrie, Fiorelli, & O’Donnell, 2006). Such a youth-centred approach is especially conducive to youth engagement and participation in working towards what they feel will be best for them. Moreover, high levels of youth engagement and participation in YPAR allows for dialogue about the institutional structures, programs and policies that affect them. These institutional forces operate with elitist and adultist interests, which are rife with politics that perceive youths as “risks” to themselves and society, thus rendering them second-class citizens (Fischer, 2003; Ginwright, 2008; Watts & Flanagan, 2007; Welton, 2011).

YPAR positions youth at its core, providing them with the opportunities to speak up about the issues, policies, and structures that impact their daily lives. As Tuck and her colleagues (2008) put it, all voices need to be heard so as to incorporate all stories, outliers and counter-stories so as to create a comprehensive and inclusive project endeavour. To this end, all youth researchers contribute their needs and interests as they collectively produce new knowledge and work towards change (Petrie, Fiorelli, & O’Donnell, 2006; Fine & Torre, 2006).

2. YPAR values youth knowledge about their lived experiences and opens up critical community space for them to critically examine issues of oppression. Following Freirean notions of collaborative inquiry, Fox and her colleagues (2010) challenge conventional notions that posit youth as empty “vessels” who require adult “wisdom” in order to understand the world around them. They note that while youth may not articulate or name concepts in the same ways as their adult counterparts, they are nonetheless cognizant of the social, political, and economic
inequities that exist in the world around them. YPAR creates a dialogic forum for youth to critically reflect upon and share their experiences with oppression, allowing them to openly engage in acts of solidarity and collectively search for solutions (Brown & Rodríguez, 2009). Their perspectives on the past and present factors – that is, the –isms and phobias (including but not limited to ageism, racism, sexism, homophobia, and xenophobia) – that affect their everyday lives are valued as expert perspectives, and are the driving forces of YPAR’s decision-making processes (Fox et al., 2010; Torre & Fine, 2006; Winton, 2007).

3. Youth possess the capacity to become critical researchers and public speakers who actively organize for change. As youth engage in critical analysis and action, they develop a repertoire of skills sets that move them closer towards “liberating themselves” (Freire, 1972). These skills, developed as the youth reflect, research, organize, analyze, and mobilize constitute what Watts, Williams, and Jagers (2003) refer to as “socio-political development.” This process, which entails the acquisition of the “knowledge, analytical skills, emotional faculties, and the capacity for action in political and social systems necessary to interpret and resist oppression” (p. 185), organically becomes an integral part of the youth’s research design, discussion, public speaking, and facilitation. With this collaboratively built foundation of new knowledge, the youth develop into confident researchers and advocates of change (Fox et al., 2010; Tuck et al., 2008).

4. YPAR is a critical “pedagogy for empowerment” that opens up vast possibilities for transformative growth at the personal, community, and institutional levels. Related to the notion of confidence in YPAR is critical youth pedagogy and empowerment. Canella (2008) refers to YPAR as a critical “pedagogy for empowerment ... The process of conducting research into one’s own life often changes the way people think about their lives and about their own
social roles” (p. 112). The confidence that the youth develop through YPAR builds their leadership potential across various domains that cut across the micro, meso-, and macro-levels, including the family, the school system, government policy, and the judicial system (Cammarota, 2008; Fox et. al., 2010; Torre, Fine, Stoudt, & Fox, 2012). This leadership potential becomes even more substantial when it is supported by networks of allies that include school personnel and officials, policy makers, family, and very importantly, other youth (Battistoni, 2004; Fox et. al., 2010).

5. YPAR is a reflective process in which all participants critically examine their roles and contributions in the work. The community aspect inherent to YPAR requires that all co-researchers consider and even engage in open dialogues about their own positionalities and contributions to the work. These positionalities, which entail features such as (but not exclusively) race/ethnicity, language ability, social class, educational attainment, and gender, all work in tandem to create varying degrees of oppression and privilege. While the youth may share similar experiences and concerns, the different “locations” of each individual yields different nuances in experiences and perspectives. Through these different “locations” and the work that will be done with, for, and by the youth, it is crucial for the participant-researchers to come together and “blend” their knowledges for a more participative and comprehensive project (Gemignani, 2011; Torre, Fine, Stoudt, & Fox, 2012).

Inherent to this “blending” is relationality between the people involved in the project and their perceptions about what it means to do YPAR. It is important for each individual to reflect not only upon how and where s/he fits into the collective work but also on the ways in which her or his power and privilege may create oppressive conditions for her or his colleagues. While the adults involved in YPAR work possess certain levels of power and privilege by virtue of their
age and other factors like professional education and experience, the youth may also possess
power and privilege over their peers in terms of various factors, including the ways in which they
choose to have their voices heard. Thinking through one’s positionalities and personality
attributes can also help spur reflection on what participation looks like in the collective work and
the ways in which it can be fostered throughout the entire group.

In consideration of the participatory and dialogic tenets of YPAR, it is also important for
all individuals – both adults and youth – to also reflect upon the ways in which they can
negotiate possible conflicts that arise from personality clashes and perspectives on how to handle
the research process (Tuck et. al., 2008). As Germignani (2011) argues, such reflexivity and a
sense of personal responsibility will help all researchers engage more closely with the work that
they do with each other.

But what about the conflicts that come from within – conflicts that do not only come
from a YPAR project within a school but also from the clashing of one’s different
positionalities? Given my multiple positionalities as a graduate student researcher and social
sciences teacher, I encountered a complex set of intertwining tensions that rendered me as an
“insider” and as an “outsider”, sometimes at the same time! On the one hand, I was an “insider”
on certain levels through my fluency in Spanish and status as a social sciences teacher who
happened to teach two sections of a research-focused class that year. Yet on the other hand, I was
also an “outsider” because I was the graduate student researcher for Proyecto Latin@ with
specific responsibilities to the University and to Rubén as a doctoral student and project
supervisee. I did, however, embody my teacher persona in the co-facilitation process. As a
person who absolutely loved teaching and who considered it a central part of her identity, I could
not simply strip it off like a piece of clothing! I did, however, have to layer my researcher and
doctoral student identities onto it, which was a task that I often found difficult. This difficulty will become apparent at various points throughout this dissertation, particularly in this chapter.

But now, I must return to the “workings” of the Proyecto Latin@ YPAR course and delineate various factors in its implementation, including the host school context and participant recruitment.

**Grasping the Momentum and the Opportunity**

The YPAR work that is the focus of this dissertation came about through the voices of the students who had participated in the exploratory phase; these perspectives were gleaned through interview data as well as through their feedback during the results-sharing sessions at each of the six school sites at which the research was conducted. The dissemination sessions took place as informal conversations during the Fall of 2010 and addressed the four key themes of the exploratory work. This information sharing with the youth not only “demonstrate[d] the ongoing central nature of [their roles as] participants … in the research”, but also helped to bring about a certain degree of their “trust in the researchers and the research process” (Fernandez, Kodish, & Weijer, 2003, p. 13).

In fact, the students were adamant that the research continue and that their voices be extended beyond anonymous names in a research paper and into further work in which they would be directly involved as co-researchers. This perspective was especially salient in the feedback from the youth at UHS, who made up one of the largest Latin@ student bodies in the TDSB. What was particularly interesting about this dissemination session was the large turnout that included not only the participating students from the first phase, but also a group of other youth who had questions and comments about the findings as well as about the next steps. I
clearly remember sitting in front of the youth at this particular sharing session – and thinking in my teacher frame of mind – that there were enough of them to make up a full class!

Indeed, these results-sharing sessions became pivotal points for the future of Proyecto Latin@, as they prompted a flurry of events that set the stage for the YPAR work that is the focus of my doctoral study. In December 2010, Rubén and I met with Jim Spyropoulos, the Superintendent of the TDSB’s Office of Equitable and Inclusive Schools and some of his staff members to discuss the future directions of our work with Latin@ youth. Superintendent Spyropoulos had read our technical report and was well acquainted with the students’ recommendations for further research involving their direct input. The meeting with Superintendent Spyropoulos resulted in the plans to continue the joint TDSB-OISE/University of Toronto work through a pilot credit course to be offered the following semester.

This course would be designed to not only expand on the findings of Proyecto Latin@’s exploratory work but also address three other specific insights articulated by the students. Based on the students’ perspectives that language barriers often hindered their academic engagement and success, the YPAR course was designed to be take on a bilingual format so that the students could express themselves in their choice of English, Spanish, or a combination of the two languages. In fact, all four members of the research/facilitation team were fully bilingual and contributed different attributes to the course, which provided the youth with the opportunities to interact with and learn from each other while improving their abilities in both languages. Additionally, this bilingualism became useful in the facilitation of the students’ research project, which were effected through four sub-groups employing different methodologies.

29 As of September 2013, this TDSB office is named Equity and Inclusive Schools.
A second insight informing the design of the YPAR course was the students’ difficulty in obtaining the information and support regarding the necessary credits to pursue post-secondary education. As such, the course was designed as a senior social science course that would not only fulfill course requirements for college and university admission, but also provide the students with a set of transferable research skills.

A third insight informing the design of the Proyecto Latin@ course was the observation that the students’ socio-economic status impacted their levels of academic engagement and achievement. To address this observation, the students were considered “researchers” and were remunerated $25.00 stipends for each class that they attended; these payments were made on a monthly basis. The students who successfully completed the program and earned their credit were also eligible for a year-end “bonus”, which was the opportunity to obtain summer work through the TDSB’s “Focus on Youth” employment program.

Despite this carefully considered design, however, Rubén and I needed to act swiftly and complete all the required tasks for the course to commence at the start of the following semester, which was only 8 weeks away! Within this timeline, which included the 2 week Christmas break, we had to draft and submit the ethics protocol to both the TDSB and the University of Toronto, design the course syllabus, obtain the TDSB Continuing Education department’s approval for the course, hire a Spanish-speaking teacher, and recruit a group of 20 students from the same school!

While this timeline was very tight, it also represented an urgent and crucial need to not only grasp the momentum and the opportunity of our work, but also to honour the students’ wishes that the research continue. In conjunction with the support of Superintendent Spyropoulos and the UHS Principal, we were also fortunate to have the collaboration of various members of TDSB and OISE/University of Toronto staff, who provided their expertise in a number of areas,
including their guidance on the expedited ethics protocol submission process and the logistics of the course. Without such commitment and support, it would not have been possible to begin the implementation of such a large scale endeavour and with such a limited time frame!

Even with all the above supports in place, it is particularly crucial to note the very tensions that can arise in a YPAR project that is carried out in a school credit-based context. Such tensions began to become evident during the ethics writing and review process. The fact that Proyecto Latin@ was a school-based research partnership between the TDSB and OISE/University of Toronto meant that our work was subject to the bureaucratic scrutiny of the ethics review boards (ERBs) of both the school board and the University. After all, one cannot simply enter the premises of a school and begin recruiting youth participants without prior approval. The Proyecto Latin@ research team was privileged to have the expedited review of the ERBs, as such review and approval generally takes months and is not guaranteed. Of particular relevance to our work was the fact that we were proposing research that would be driven by a group of youth who had yet to be recruited. Even though we could explicitly delineate the work’s rationale and provide a literature review, how could we specifically articulate the research designs or data analysis methods under such circumstances?

In a sense, the initial ethics protocol writing process brings Lather’s (2012) idea of the “future pluperfect tense of the post” to my mind, an idea that she describes as a “valuable lesson of attention to how the which has been lost in the past might transform the future out of the work of the present” (p. ix). Such conditions provide a fruitful ground for a “generative methodology that registers a possibility and marks a provisional space in which a different science might take form … with more to answer to in terms of the complexities of language and the world” (Lather, 2012, p. 117). In this work in particular, the generative methodology is a transnational Latin@
feminist YPAR with and by the students. As I have already mentioned in various instances in this dissertation, the students articulated their desire to engage in emancipatory work that would address the historical opportunity gaps that they have been facing at school. In these conversations, they also contested the essentialist perspectives contributed to negative stereotypes and spoke to their transnational and shifting *latinidades*, which constituted a source of both diversity and unity among and between them.

Yet at the same time, I must again highlight the institutional (and ethical) requirements to obtain ERB approval and do the YPAR work in the first place. As researchers and teachers, we are institutionally and morally responsible for protecting the youth from physical and/or psychological harm. Yet at the same time, I still wonder about how institutions that are accustomed to traditional and positivist ideas about research can work hand in hand with social justice projects like those involving YPAR, even in consideration of the fact that addenda are submitted to the ERBs as the students’ research projects develop (Cahill, 2007).

Then again, we as the four adult researchers possessed different aspects of the necessary capital to navigate the institutional requirements for doing such work. As the Principal Investigator and faculty member at the Centre for Urban Schooling at OISE/University of Toronto, Professor Rubén Gaztambide-Fernández brought with him over ten years of experience doing qualitative research, much of which focused on the schooling experiences of youth. His position, expertise, and experience were instrumental in necessary bureaucratic tasks of obtaining ERB approval and funding.

As a doctoral student and graduate student researcher for both phases of Proyecto Latin@, my (Cristina Guerrero) roles entailed a variety of tasks, including co-drafting the ethics protocols and liaising with school staff to schedule information sessions and room
bookings. My bilingualism, which was derived from a combination of my Spanish-speaking upbringing, university programs, and teacher qualification, were useful throughout the course’s inception and implementation. Additionally, my six years as a TDSB teacher of social sciences also meant that I possessed an in-depth understanding of the provincial curriculum guidelines as well as experience with the administration of the Individual Education Plans (IEPs) for the two students who had them. Through my employee number and password, I also had access to the UHS computers, which we used for presentations using PowerPoint and other programs.

As the official course instructor, Mónica Rosas brought with her several years of experience with teaching in TDSB alternative school programs as well as a wide repertoire of teaching strategies that included both participatory and Indigenous pedagogies. Through her previous volunteer experience collecting data from some of the Spanish-speaking youth during the first phase of Proyecto Latin@, she had also developed a relationship with UHS and some of its students.

Undergraduate research assistant Elizabeth Guerrero brought with her several years of experience tutoring and mentoring youth from Toronto’s Latin@ community. Like the other course facilitators, she had also been involved in the first phase of Proyecto Latin@; her role comprised writing parts of the technical report. At the time of the YPAR phase, Elizabeth had already completed her undergraduate program in Spanish and Women and Gender Studies and was enrolled in the Inner City cohort of OISE/University of Toronto’s Initial Teacher Education program.

Our collective professional, academic, and linguistic capital, then, provided us with a variety of means through which to support our work with the youth at UHS. While the four of us all served as course facilitators, we guided the youth in the process of developing their projects
in different ways. Nonetheless, the combination of our knowledge and that of the youth all worked in tandem to shape their overall research question and project proposals, excerpts of which Rubén and I then incorporated into the ERB addenda.

Despite the students’ input and shaping of the work to be included in the ERB addenda, I still need to point out the ways in which doing YPAR in a school credit-based setting mandates that institutional requirements be fulfilled by the adults who are involved. In this case, the particular adults who were responsible for fulfilling such institutional requirements were the University Professor (Rubén) and the doctoral student writing her thesis on the project (me).

Boser (2007) also ponders such tensions between the ERB and the researchers and insists that the former assumes a vertical hierarchical relationship in which it exercises “power over the researchers, the power to withhold approval of research projects or to make such approval contingent on modifications of research design” (p. 1063). She adds that ethics review boards assume that this hierarchical power structure exists between the researcher and participant, thus limiting the capacity of the latter within the research. So how does it work when the participants are also the researchers? Here, the dialectic and collaborative nature of YPAR certainly troubles prevalent notions of power asymmetries that are inherent in conventional research. These tensions become intensified when academic researchers are challenged with articulating their collaboration with their participant-colleagues while attempting to adhere to the regulatory bodies that grant them the permission to conduct their work in the first place.

Despite these challenges, Boser also asserts that ethics review boards operate in compliance with higher levels of regulations. As such, she calls on participatory practitioners to also reflect on the power dynamics in their work and to strive for transparency and accountability. As Kuriloff, Andrus, and Ravitch (2011) suggest, it does not suffice to merely
consider ethics review as the sole evidence of ethicality, for ethical stances must be clearly brought about throughout every step of the research process. Indeed, the researchers’ positionalities and ideologies about their work and what it should look like are prone to clashes, which in turn require them to continuously reflect upon the process.

Because the YPAR phase of Proyecto Latin@ was to be implemented as a credit course at a TDSB school, it was necessary to hire a TDSB teacher for its implementation. Indeed, the teacher position required a particular set of responsibilities, which included both administrative and curriculum-related tasks like fulfilling the necessary hours of instruction, accurately documenting attendance, teaching the curriculum as per provincial guidelines, and entering grades through the TDSB’s Trillium system, which in itself was only accessible to Board employees. Asides from being documented measures of accountability, each of these duties was absolutely necessary so that the TDSB could issue the course grades and credits to the students.

Despite my employment status and six years of experience as a TDSB social sciences teacher, I was ineligible to take on the instructor position for the YPAR course. While the course was to be delivered through the TDSB, it was part of a research study in which I was involved as a graduate student researcher and not a teacher. In fact, I was involved with Proyecto Latin@ as a graduate student researcher from its very inception, and had contributed to each step of its development, including the co-drafting of the ethics protocols, data collection and analysis, and the dissemination of findings. Moreover, my intention to write my doctoral dissertation on Proyecto Latin@ was indicated on the submitted ethics protocols. As such, it would have been a significant conflict of interest for me to simultaneously conduct a research study on the youth and serve as the grading course instructor.
The Proyecto Latin@ Course in Action

The Proyecto Latin@ YPAR credit course was delivered as a Saturday course at UHS that ran from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. In order to fulfill the required number of instructional hours for credit-granting purposes, the course also included two full-day Sunday research camps and a Friday evening evaluation session at OISE/University of Toronto. Identified as a high needs school by TDSB’s Urban Diversity Strategy, UHS was also one of the six research sites during the first phase of Proyecto Latin@. Additionally, UHS had the highest Latin@ student population in the TDSB.

Student recruitment

As UHS already had a relationship with Proyecto Latin@ through its participation in the exploratory phase and the dissemination sessions, a number of students already had an idea of the work’s focus on Latin@ students. To recruit the students for the course, we worked with the UHS staff to issue bilingual announcements on the school’s electronic message boards and to hold information sessions about the course and its schedule. One of the school’s hall and safety monitors, who was himself a Latin@, also played a key role in sharing details about the information sessions with the students.

In collaboration with the Guidance department at UHS, we drafted the electronic board announcement for the information sessions. This announcement, which was written in both English and Spanish, read as follows:
HEADLINE: ¡Los sábados nunca serán lo mismo!

BODY: ¿Eres latino o latina? ¡Ven a pasártela bien con la amistad y el servicio comunitario! ¡Ven a estudiar nuestra cultura latina en cambio por un crédito!

Ven a comer con nosotros en una de las sesiones de información para saber más.

Cuando: martes 8 de febrero a las 3:30 y miércoles 9 de febrero a las 12

Los estudiantes de todos niveles de español e inglés son bienvenidos.

HEADLINE: Saturdays will never be the same!

BODY: Latino? Explore our culture for school credit – and fun, friendship and community service!

Come and have a slice and see what it’s all about.

Information sessions: Tues Feb 8 3:30pm & Wed Feb 9 noon

Students at all levels of English and/or Spanish are welcome.

In this short message, it was important to convey several important pieces of information, including the fact that the credit course was scheduled to run on Saturday and address topics related to Latin@ youth. Given that the information sessions took place either at lunch time or after school, pizza and refreshments were also provided, which in turn offered opportunities for the students to take the time to eat with us and ask questions about the course and its requirements. The indication that students of varying levels of linguistic abilities in English and Spanish was a crucial component to the recruitment process, as we felt that it was important to address the students’ concerns about language barriers and offer all interested students the opportunities to participate in the Latin@ student-centred YPAR course.

Indeed, one of the school’s hall monitors also helped spread information about the course to the students. The respect and admiration that the students had towards this staff member was
not only made clear through his involvement in connecting the students with information about the exploratory phase of Proyecto Latin@, but also through the data that emerged from our work at UHS. In fact, several students commented on the warm and caring relationships that they had with him and pointed to him as a source of valuable information and support with respect to school activities. During the recruitment process for the YPAR phase, he also made personal outreach efforts to encourage the school’s Latin@ students to attend the information session and sign up for the course. An avid supporter of the study’s work at UHS, this staff member also provided his support the following year by serving as a chaperone for a trip to an academic conference in the U.S.

The information sessions were particularly important in recruiting the students, as they provided the space with the opportunities to ask the research team questions in their choice of Spanish or English and to obtain the necessary documents pertaining to the course. These documents included the parental information and consent forms and were also made available in the students’ choice of language. Because the circumstances involved youth, many of whom were under the age of consent\(^\text{30}\) – and who would be participants in a joint institutional study by virtue of their course enrolment – it was of utmost importance for their parents to receive and understand this information. Their signed consent would not only confirm their understanding that their child(ren) would participate in the class that was part of a research study, but also that they consented to data collection activities such as the videotaping of the class meetings. The students who were over the age of majority – that is, 18 year of age or older – were required to read and sign their own consent forms.

\(^{30}\) In this case, the age of consent was 18 years, which is the age of majority in Ontario.
To encourage participation among students of varying academic levels, we also distributed an application form in which the students would state both their reasons for wanting to enroll in the course as well as the personal strengths and attributes that they would bring to the class. The students’ comments varied, and included details ranging from their interest in learning more about their culture to a desire to incorporate social justice issues in music. This form, which was incorporated as a means of gauging the students’ interests, also served as a measure through which to pre-screen the students in the event that the number of applications exceeded the cap for the class roster, which was limited to 20 spaces. We were most fortunate, however, to have received 20 applications and to not have been faced with the task of turning away any students.

The initial class roster comprised 9 females and 11 males between grades 10 and 12. In terms of age, the students were between 15 and 22 years old. Some of the students who were over the age of 18 had previously been enrolled in university programs such as computer science and architecture in their home countries. In terms of countries of origin, the students represented a wide range of countries across Latin America that included Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico, Guatemala, and Uruguay. Two students were Canadian-born and the remaining eighteen were born in Latin America. Nineteen students were bilingual to some degree and one student was a new English language learner. Two students had Individual Education Plans (IEPs) and were provided with the necessary accommodations and modifications throughout the semester. Out of the 20 students, eighteen (8 females and 10 males) fulfilled all attendance, term work, and summative course requirements and received the senior social science credit for which they were enrolled. The other two students were absent more than three times, which rendered them
ineligible for the credit as per the requirements of the TDSB Office of Continuing Education (Gaztambide-Fernández, Guerrero, Rosas, & Guerrero, 2011).

**Doing YPAR: An example of how the adult facilitators did it**

The adult facilitators prepared for the course by meeting for a few hours once a week between classes. At each of these meetings, we would debrief the previous class and collectively determine the next steps based on the students’ feedback and the curriculum expectations that we needed to address. Here, we would also agree on everyone’s roles and contributions for the next class. For the first class meeting, we sought to begin to create a collaborative learning community that would then be fostered throughout the semester. Even though all the enrolled students attended UHS, the school had a student population of about 2,000 and as such, the first class would mark the first time that many of the youth would be meeting each other. This creation of a class community, then, was a crucial component in our quest to honour and practice the key principles of YPAR.

In the introductory class, we opened with a circle, introduced ourselves and described the rationale of the course. To help the students get to know each other, Mónica incorporated ice breakers that not only took on a variety of formats, but also demanded that the students engage in team-oriented activities. She began with a name game, in each of the students introduced her or himself with an adjective beginning with the first letter of her or his name. The challenging task here was that the students had to introduce themselves and remember the names and adjectives of everyone else who had previously had their turn. As I will later mention in the sixth chapter, this game was a source of fun and laughter for everyone except for me, who as a teacher experienced discomfort in repeating a student’s introduction of himself as “Sexy Student.” Despite my own unease, however, I do consider the introductory activity itself as a valuable one.
that creates possibilities for the creation of community. In fact, each class opened and closed with everyone in a circle and engaged in collective activities of relationship-building and decision-making. As we will see in Chapter 5, the students highly regarded these activities and felt that they contributed to the creation of a caring learning community and the development of their own abilities and skills to actively engage with the research in the course.

The lesson for this first class meeting included a variety of activities incorporating different learning styles, including a PowerPoint presentation on the agents of socialization, a body mapping activity in which the students traced their own bodies and wrote messages on them related to their interactions with others, and an introduction to the interview process. While I facilitated the PowerPoint using my previous work teaching a grade 11 social sciences class, Rubén facilitated the interview introduction and practice time. The four of us co-facilitated the body mapping activity.

Of course, we each took on varying roles in the facilitation and co-facilitation of the course and its activities, which stemmed through an organic process and through our planning meetings in between classes. Despite this organic process, I nonetheless want to reiterate that the opening and closing of each and every class comprised a circle that fostered continuous relationship-building and collective decision-making. Such factors were important in our quest to practice YPAR that truly honoured the students’ voices and inputs as researchers and members of our team.

**Introducing the student-researchers**

As I previously mentioned in this chapter, the youth were not only enrolled students but also researchers who were engaged in their own research projects. So far, I have provided an overview of the class’ demographics. Below, I will expand on this data and individually
introduce each of the students. These introductions will serve as a means of providing details on each student and simplifying the discussions in the data analysis chapters, particularly chapters 5 and 6, which specifically focus on the YPAR work. Here, I will reiterate that I have used pseudonyms for each and every one of the students that I name below.

Twenty-one year old Susana was a twelfth grader who came from Mexico about three and a half years before the beginning of the YPAR course. She had also provided her perspectives in the first phase of Proyecto Latin@ earlier. While she was fluent in English, she expressed herself in Spanish.

Like Susana, twelfth grader Mariano had also participated in the exploratory work of Proyecto Latin@. This Colombian-born student was 22 years old and had lived in Germany for 9 years prior to arriving in Canada about four years before enrolling in the YPAR course. Although Mariano was fluent in English and German, he used Spanish as his primary language of communication in the class.

Fifteen year old Melisa was a tenth grader who was born in Canada to Ecuadorean parents. While she demonstrated her comprehension of the Spanish language when it came to responding to instructions and her peers’ comments, she predominantly communicated in English throughout the semester.

Eighteen year old Luciana immigrated to Canada from Guatemala 9 years before the start of the Proyecto Latin@ YPAR course. She was in the eleventh grade and also used Spanish as her primary language of communication.

Colombian-born Yadira was twenty-two years old and was in the twelfth grade. She had immigrated to Canada two and a half years earlier and like many of her peers also articulated herself in Spanish.
Eighteen year old Miguel was a Canadian-born youth of Guatemalan parentage. Like Melisa, this twelfth grader was English dominant and spoke English when expressing his views. Nonetheless, he also demonstrated his comprehension of the Spanish language when it came to class instructions and activities.

Nineteen year old Martín was born in Mexico but lived in the United States for about eight years before migrating to Canada. While he had already completed his graduation requirements, he was still enrolled in school as a twelfth grader. In class, he articulated himself in a combination of Spanish and English.

Mexican born Nicolás was an eleventh grader who had arrived in Canada a few years earlier. He was 17 years old and contributed to the class discussions and activities in Spanish.

Nineteen year old Linda was born in Colombia and arrived in Canada via the United States two and half years before the start of the Proyecto Latin@ course. She was in the twelfth grade and provided her perspectives in class using the Spanish language.

Like Linda, Daniel was also 19 years old and in the twelfth grade. This Mexican-born student had arrived in Canada as a refugee less than a year before beginning the Proyecto Latin@ course. His choice of language for expressing himself was also Spanish.

Fifteen year old Araceli was a tenth grader who had arrived from Colombia 8 years earlier. Like many of her peers who had been in Canada for a number of years, she was fluent in English but contributed to the class discussions in Spanish.

Peruvian-born Juana was 21 years old and had arrived in Canada two and a half years before the start of the YPAR course. She was in the twelfth grade and used Spanish to share her perspectives in class.
Nineteen year old Gabriel was born in Guatemala and had arrived in Canada about 18 months before the Proyecto Latin@ course. He was in the twelfth grade and also expressed himself in Spanish during class discussions and activities.

Sixteen year old Sebastián was Gabriel’s brother and also arrived in Canada about 18 months earlier. Like Martín, this tenth grader contributed to the class using a combination of Spanish and English.

Germán was born in Colombia and migrated to Canada three years earlier. This 16 year old, who was in the eleventh grade, predominantly used Spanish as his primary language of communication in the class.

Fifteen year old Marisol was born in Colombia and was in the tenth grade. Like her brother Germán, she also mostly communicated in Spanish during the class discussions and activities.

Tenth grader Ricardo was fifteen years old and also came from Colombia. He had arrived in Canada about 8 months prior to the start of the YPAR class and spoke Spanish throughout the semester.

Fifteen year old Guillermo was a tenth grade student who had immigrated to Canada from Uruguay about 18 months earlier. Guillermo primarily communicated in Spanish, and like a significant number of people from Uruguay, he was descended from Italians who had immigrated to South America.

While the majority of the above student details emerged through the different activities and conversations that ensued as the course progressed, I did collect some data about the students’ length of time in Canada Facebook conversations. In the next section, I will detail each of the data collection instruments that we used during the course.
Data collection … and some of the ethical dilemmas that accompanied the process

The participatory and school-based context of this YPAR study provided a variety of means through which to obtain different types of data. While the participatory principles of YPAR provided a forum through which to generate collective discussion, the course-based format provided the opportunities for the adult facilitators to incorporate tasks that yielded student “products” for grading by Mónica. These products included the final written reflections, in which the students individually commented on their experiences with the course and their suggestions for improvement. These final evaluations also took on an interactive format that was implemented as focus group conversations that were audio-recorded and then transcribed by myself and Elizabeth. Some of the data discussed in this dissertation was also collected after the end of the course through Facebook conversations.

Many of the class discussions and portions of the students’ work sessions were also documented on video tape. This method was particularly useful because it captured the students’ commentaries as well as their interactions with each other in small group settings and in the larger class context. In honouring the youth-centred and democratic ideals of YPAR, however, it was necessary to first consult with the students before commencing the practice of regularly video-recording them. Because of their initial concerns about the ways in which the presence of the recording equipment might inhibit them from freely expressing their perspectives, the videotaping did not begin until the students determined that they wanted to record their discussions.

The students’ initial reluctance was particularly challenging for Rubén, who brought the video-camera to the first class so that he can begin the process of data collection from the very beginning. In consideration of our commitment to the democratic ideals of YPAR, he consulted
with the youth prior to commencing any audio- or video-recording. Because of the students’ initial apprehensions about the ways in which the recording equipment might interfere with their abilities (or confidence) in freely expressing their perspectives,

Rubén reluctantly agreed to relinquish his need as a researcher to record the process from the start. It took some time before the students themselves began to recognize the value of documenting their own process, and in subsequent classes the students decided that they wanted to regularly record their conversations. After we handed control of all recording devices to the students, they took shared responsibility not only for deciding when and how to record various aspects of our time together, but also for helping each other learn how to use the equipment (Guerrero, Gaztambide-Fernández, Rosas, & Guerrero, 2013, p. 116).

The video data shows some of our culture circles, which constituted a central component of the youth-focused class discussions. These circles were implemented not only as a way of creating and nurturing community, but also as a collective means through which to mark the start and the end of each class. As course facilitators, we drew our notions and uses of the circle from both Indigenous frameworks and practices (e.g. Battiste, 2002), as well as the concept of “culture circles” from critical pedagogy (Freire, 1972; see also Souto-Manning, 2010). In addition to becoming a key means of collaborative decision making about course components like determining the roster of guest speakers\(^{31}\) as well as lesson topics, our weekly circles also served

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\(^{31}\) Our guest speakers contributed a wide breadth of knowledge that included the visual arts, music, research methods, and community project building. While an art history professor from a local university shared information about the indigenous presence in Mexican art, a maracatû performer engaged the students with making their own musical pieces. A doctoral student from an Ontario university shared her findings on street youth in Ecuador, and later helped a group of students conduct and analyze their own surveys. Another guest speaker shared his work with local activist endeavours involving the rights of migrant tomato workers. He also happened to work for a local Spanish-language radio station, which led to significant future opportunities for some of the students, particularly twelfth-grader Nicolás. As this dissertation continues, we shall see Nicolás’ transformation from a self-described shy
as a decolonizing pedagogical tool through which the students were able to take ownership of
their learning space (McGregor, 2004; Tuck et. al, 2008). We carried out our sharing circles
acknowledging that our work was taking place on the traditional lands of the Mississauga
Anishinaabe and the Haudenosaunee Confederacy. As Latin@s, we bring our own Indigenous
histories and heritages from other parts of Abya Yala, the landmass known as America. Yet at
the same time, we recognized that our presence on this particular land is premised on continued
colonization by the Canadian nation as a settler state (see Haig-Brown, 2009; Lawrence & Dua,
2005; Sehdev, 2011). This multi-layered consciousness created a profound sense of caring for
our learning space as a “spiritual and material entity” (Haig-Brown, 2009, p. 4), an entity
through which we collectively shared our pasts, our presents, and our relationships to them.
Some of the sharing and knowledge building that ensued in our culture circles is discussed in the
data analysis chapters of this dissertation.

The youth’s sharing and knowledge co-creation also occurred through the various group
activities that were implemented throughout the semester. These collaborative endeavours, which
were part of the coursework from the very beginning, revealed a great deal of data about the
students’ perspectives and in a sense, the interactions between them, some of which are
discussed in further detail in the chapter on community engagement. Whether addressing topics
relevant to the Latin@ student experience or ways of conducting research, each of these
collaborative endeavours was related to the development of the students’ research projects. Of
particular note are the first three activities that I describe below, which were implemented in the
course’s first few weeks and generated much discussion that later informed the students’
research themes, questions, and methodologies.
The purpose of the concept word maps was to have each group of students brainstorm, record, and then share the words and phrases that they associated with being Latin@. The sharing process revealed particular patterns of both negative and positive associations derived from a combination of the students’ lived experiences, personal beliefs, and perspectives on media representations of Latin@s and the ways in which these representations figured into their social interactions with others. What I found particularly useful in these words maps were the students’ consistent usage of collective subject pronouns like nosotros (us), which is a topic that I take up in the chapter on self-identification as Latin@.

Related to the notion of the social interactions and the ways in which they affected the students both externally and internally were the body maps, which were life-sized depictions constructed by tracing the body of one of the group members. The students were asked to then
use sticky notes to record messages that others have told them and their interpretations of these messages. The messages from others were placed on the outside of the body and their interpretations were placed on the inside of the body outline.

The purpose of this activity was for the students to think about who said what to them and the implications of such messages. The body maps revealed not only gendered stereotypes, but also an astounding consistency in the students’ overall desire to contest perceptions of them that cast them as hyper-sexualized, lazy, and incapable of academic and professional success.

The purpose of the **problem trees** was for the students to think about and visually depict their understandings of the problems affecting them. While the tree trunk would serve as the place on which to identify problems, the leaves would illustrate examples of these problems. In turn, the roots were meant to illustrate what the students believed were the causes of such problems.

Many of the students cited problems related to the migration experience and settlement, which in turn revealed barriers such as language, discrimination, and downward socio-economic
mobility. During the sharing process, the students not only articulated their experiences, but also cited the ways in which historical phenomena like colonialism continued to figure into the systemic and institutional barriers that pervaded their lives, perhaps even more so in Canada. For me, it seems that this activity greatly figured into the students’ overarching research question, which addressed the ways in which social institutions impacted the happiness of Latin@s in Canada.

The audio-recorded group course evaluations, which were conducted on the evening before the final class presentation, comprised yet another instrument of data collection. These evaluations were implemented in groups of 2 to 4 and surveyed the students’ initial expectations of the Proyecto Latin@ course, their own experiences, and their suggestions for improvement.
As all these conversations occurred at the same time and in order to be able to collect and transcribe the data, each group operated its own audio-recorder. The adult facilitators circulated between all the groups to answer any questions and at times to join in the conversations.

The students’ written reflections also provided rich and insightful data sets for this present study. These individually written pieces, which formed part of the summative course evaluation, were intended to elicit the students’ individual perspectives on their initial expectations of the Proyecto Latin@ course, their experiences with inclusion and/or exclusion, their most memorable moments, and their most challenging moments. The students were also asked to evaluate themselves on a scale of 1 to 10 and to describe their rationale for their self-evaluation. This input was intended for the students to reflect upon their contributions to the collective and to participate in the process of grading themselves.

Lastly, the Facebook conversations that I had with some of the students after the end of the course provided me with follow-up information on their post-secondary activities, their perspectives on how they applied their learning from the Proyecto Latin@ course in their daily lives, and on their length of time in Canada. In each instance in which I contacted the students, I was clear about the purpose of my questions and indicated that their responses were voluntary. None of the students declined comment and as such, these Facebook inquiries had a 100 percent response rate.

Nonetheless … there’s still a “push and pull” to the process

As I have articulated earlier in this chapter, the YPAR methodology that informs this dissertation garnered its transnational Latin@ feminist theorization from the conversations and activities that ensued in the Proyecto Latin@ course spaces. Even though the data collection instruments were initiated by the adult facilitators as a means of producing data on the students’
perspectives, there was nonetheless a “push and pull” inherent to the process of facilitating a
group of youth and the challenges of guiding the process rather than “telling” them what to do.
There were instances in which each of us adult facilitators felt that our intervention was
necessary when we felt that things were not moving in the ways that we wanted or hoped,
particularly in instances that we deemed problematic.

One particular instance of feeling the “push and pull” of the YPAR process occurred
during a class debrief of a guest workshop on gender. The topic of gender roles and sexual
violence generated intense debate and division between the students. During a heated set of
comments about whether or not provocatively dressed women incited sexual violence upon
themselves, one of the male students interjected with a metaphor that likened scantily-clad
females to steak, asking the question: “If you throw a piece of steak out onto the streets, how do
you not expect the dogs to go after it?” This question incited uproar among the female students,
who retorted that such points of view were sexist and a blatant reproduction of very patriarchal
and oppressive attitudes that had been challenged in their workshop earlier that day. They added
that men had the responsibility to respect women and to understand the concept of consent for
sex, which did not include what they choose to wear.

In episodes such as this one, we often felt torn between our commitment to honoring the
students’ process of discovery, which included their perspectives, and our own conceptions of
what the students should think, or should do. Of course, our own ideologies of what YPAR
should look like were shaped by the academic research that we had read, which tended to portray
youth as critical individuals who critique the world around it and who seek its transformation. As
the data in the following chapters will reveal, there were many instances during our early
discussions when the students offered compelling critiques of power relations, racism and
colonialism. Yet during the process of developing the research questions, the students put forth (what seemed to us) overly simplistic themes. In their discussion of happiness (or the lack thereof) as a key component of the immigration experience, we attempted to push their analysis further, which in turn seemed to generate disagreement and conflict among the students.

What became apparent in this process was that as critical educators and consumers of the academic literature on YPAR, we had constructed a romanticized conception of what YPAR was supposed to look like and that this conception was not necessarily (or singularly) what was unfolding in front of us (see Guishard, 2009; Nishad, 2011). Yet, as we took a step back, accepted the students’ initial research questions and then began to guide further discussion, we realized that what really mattered was not whether the students had developed “critical consciousness,” but rather that they took the steps to talk through their conflict and disagreements with each other. The process of posing questions and talking through conflict and disagreements became crucial factors not only in the building of the students’ collaborative relationships with each other, but also in the development of their research projects. For us adults, this process helped us move away from our romantic assumptions about YPAR and to facilitate discussion and probing questions as a means of centering the students’ desires to engage in inquiry on the topics that they deemed relevant to their lived experiences as Latin@s.

In turn, this focus on the students provided a forum through which they could develop their own counter-stories and shifting epistemologies in ways that made apparent the “complexity, contradiction, and the self-determination of lived lives” (Tuck, 2009, p. 416).

In the face of all this student-centred work, what about questions of validity?

Of course, my teacher identity conflicted with my beliefs as a critical educator and figured into my own apprehensions about facilitating a course that was not only a student-centred
endeavour, but also one that happened to have the same course designation of one of the classes
that I was teaching that year. While I was not the “official” teacher for this course, I nonetheless
worried about how we would document our work’s connections to the provincial curriculum so
that there would be no questions (or rather, doubt) when the time came for the school board to
grant each student their credit. Moreover, I strongly felt that it was necessary that we provide the
students with a course that would provide them with the knowledge and the tools to engage in
their future educational pursuits.

To assuage my doubts about “following” the curriculum, I led a PowerPoint lesson on the
agents of socialization, which was based on a text that I used as a teacher – *Introduction to
Anthropology, Psychology and Sociology*. Despite my adult colleagues’ apprehensions toward
my usage of the textbook, I did use it in another instance to discuss the notion of ethics in the
research process. Then again, the joint work with my adult and youth colleagues yielded a great
deal of other kinds of “texts” and resources that both addressed the social science inquiry
requirements of the course as well as the youth-centred tenets of YPAR. As part of a democratic
team, I neither wanted to undermine my colleagues nor feel that I was not heard.

Even three years after this incident, I still feel a sense of uneasiness. While this process of
balancing roles and YPAR with institutional demands was by no means easy, there is another
side that has me feeling that the end result of the course was one that yielded what Morell (2006)
terms “legitimate research in its own right.” After all, the students collaboratively investigated a
problem that the wanted to research and incorporated a variety of methodologies in the process.
In the face of being held up to the scrutiny of ERBs, the TDSB, and the public, the students’
work underwent constant checks for validity, particularly with respect to discussions about
epistemology and methodology (Torre, Fine, Stoudt, & Fox, 2012). In YPAR work, however, it
is necessary to re-define “familiar notions of validity while at other times [it] require[s] new
types of validity” (Torre, Fine, Stoudt, & Fox, 2012, p. 20).

For us, such validity checks involved consulting with the work of other (experienced)
YPAR practitioners, whether through readings or through telephone/email conversations. For
instance, Rubén and I spoke to Maria Torre in the weeks before starting the course and addressed
issues like ethics review, class activities, and community building. We also drew upon some of
the concepts that we learned during a PAR workshop that she had previously delivered at
OISE/University of Toronto and infused them into our work with the youth. A key theme
emerging from such consulting was the central and expert roles of the youth; this continuous
fusion of theory and practice allowed for various cycles of participatory theorization and
deconstruction that created youth standpoints from which to identify as well as assess the
research problems. The youth epistemologies were further validated with the guidance of “varied
forms of ‘legitimated’ expertise” (Torre, Fine, Stoudt, & Fox, 2012, p. 32) from adult allies that
the students themselves wanted in their space, which not only included the adult facilitators, but
other educators, local artists, and members of the Latin@ community. This student-driven
enrichment of the YPAR curriculum effectuated a joint development of theoretical frameworks
and research designs that integrated a robust and diverse array of epistemologies and expertise,
which in turn added to its relevance as a critical and valid way of doing research.

So…what did the students’ research projects involve?

As a collective, the students considered the educational, socio-economic, and political
issues affecting the Latin@ community in Canada. Through these considerations and after much
deliberation, they determined that their overall research question would be: “How do social
institutions such as the government, mass media, and the school system impact the happiness of
Latina/o students in Canada?” While the students as a whole were keenly interested in exploring the experiences of their community members and devising strategies to address such experiences, they also expressed a variety of interests in terms of how they would explore such a question. The ensuing conversations resulted in the establishment of four sub-groups that would take on different research methodologies and aspects of the overarching research question. To help the students with their research, each of the four course co-facilitators worked closely with one sub-study group and served as a guide in the organizing, research proposal writing, data collection, data analysis, and dissemination processes. Here, I also would like to add that the findings of each of these four groups pointed to the very need to continue engaging Latin@ youth with and through research on their communities in Toronto and across Canada.

The first sub-study incorporated mixed media collages and round-table discussions to examine the happiness of Latin@ youths in Toronto high schools. Initially, this group had intended to only employ the mixed media collages, but during their process of data analysis, they found that school was not mentioned by the students as a factor contributing to their happiness. They had hypothesized that school would somehow figure into their participants’ narratives of happiness when they shared their collages, especially since it was prominent in some of their collage images. To further probe this finding, the students recalled their participants and conducted a round-table discussion and a written reflection component so that they could better understand the data that they had collected. The sub-study’s participants shared that while school was a locale in which they interacted with their friends, bullying, discrimination, and the lack of technology in the classroom comprised sources of their disillusion. From these findings, the group recommended that the adults work on more relevant curriculum as well as the fostering of
meaningful relationships in the class and across the school. I (Cristina) worked closely with the members of this sub-study group.

The second sub-study incorporated the drawing of self-portraits to represent Latin@ youths’ perceptions of happiness inside and outside the school setting. The student-researchers in this group also incorporated individual interviews to find out each student’s thoughts on her or his work. This group found that the school provided both frustration and hope in their lives as Latin@s in Canada. While many of this group’s participants found that language barriers and limited course choices at school created obstacles in their happiness as Latin@ youth, they also found that the ability to attend school in Canada created feelings of hope for the future. In addition to creating a PowerPoint presentation of their findings, the students also created a collective painting that incorporated the themes that they had found in their data. This painting is found at the beginning of the 5th chapter of this dissertation. Mónica worked closely with this group.
The third sub-study employed individual interviews and focus groups to explore the relationships between identification as Latin@ and academic success. Their data revealed the necessity of providing Latin@ students with more teacher, administrative, guidance and social service support, particularly among those who were recent immigrants. Elizabeth was the adult who worked closely with this group.
The fourth sub-study created a paper survey that included Likert scales and questions about the participants’ experiences in both their home countries and in Canada. These questions addressed experiences at school, at home, and at work, and provided the students with the means to draw up a comparative analysis. Through a statistical analysis of over 160 surveys, this group found that Latin@ adults cited “quality of life” as a key factor for immigrating to Canada. When considering their levels of satisfaction related to education, the respondents tended to be more satisfied with the opportunities available in Canada. However, those who had or were going to school in Canada were less satisfied with their relationships with peers and teachers, in comparison to their country of origin. Rubén worked closely with this group, and he enlisted the help of the doctoral student who had experience with quantitative research. This student was the
same one who had previously visited the students to share her work with street youth in Ecuador and who had provided them with a survey exemplar to consider in their own work.

Although each group incorporated specific components to their research in terms of methodology, there were other components that were taken up by the class as a whole. Details about research requirements such as participant recruitment and consent documentation occurred in a class-wide setting. The students also received guidance on facilitating group discussions and using tape and video-recorders to collect their data. These processes were accompanied by the opportunities to pilot their data collection instruments with their classmates and to obtain their feedback prior to the actual data collection sessions. After the students collected their data, they learned about data analysis through a full-day research camp that took up transcription, theme generation, and the selection of participant quotes, audio, and video footage. Each group was responsible for the processing, organizing, categorizing and analyzing of the data they collected, which provided opportunities to develop additional skills. During the long (and sometimes tedious!) process of transcribing, for instance, the students practiced their language skills in both languages and helped each other with grammar and spelling.

Even though the students worked on four sub-studies, they all worked together to organize their public dissemination event at OISE/University of Toronto on the last day of the class, which was on June 25th, 2011. Each group had a representative on the event organization committee. Mariano designed several versions of the Proyecto Latin® logo; the version that was voted as the favourite among the students was then imprinted on t-shirts that all the students and adult facilitators would wear at the dissemination event. Other tasks for the dissemination event included creating and distributing personalized invitation letters, e-mails, and Facebook event announcements.
The public presentation was a success and included an audience of approximately 100 attendees, including TDSB school administrators, system officials, school trustees, representatives from local organizations, and members of Toronto’s Latin@ community. What was notable about this event and the effort that the students put into its organization and the research projects themselves is the sense of accomplishment that they expressed. Indeed, each student-researcher had the opportunity to express in their own words and in their own ways, what they had learned and where they wanted this learning to go. While I will return to these points about learning and the transformative possibilities created through YPAR in the 6th chapter, here assert that facilitating and supporting youth recommendations about peer-to-peer and youth-led curriculum fosters their success, even when the demands are high.

Such student perspectives made meaningful and valuable contributions to the data collected in the course, which I also used for this dissertation, particularly in the 5th and 6th chapters, which address community engagement and transformative learning. But how what did I make of this data? How did I analyze all this rich and extensive data? In the next section, I share how I analyzed the data produced from the YPAR course.
Data Analysis for this Dissertation

Because of the multitude of data collection instruments in this phase of Proyecto Latin@, I needed to employ several different procedures to convert the data into a “text” format that I could analyze and then include in this dissertation.

As I had over 30 hours of video footage to look at, I chose to watch it, make notes, and then record the times that I felt required transcription. I also took a few screenshots of some of the students’ work for the purposes of interpretation and inclusion in the data analysis chapters. The audio-recordings from the final student evaluations were also transcribed; this process was accomplished by myself and Elizabeth. In addition to addressing the class activities and topics as well as our mealtimes together, many of these evaluations addressed the students’ research projects and the processes involved in carrying them out. Because I did not want to write on the students’ original final reflections, I scanned each piece and then printed them out for the analysis process. I also printed out the Facebook conversations that I used for my data. Because they were collected as a means of filling in specific information gaps related to my data analysis themes, I simply used the excerpts that I felt were the most relevant.

While I used Atlas.ti to analyze the interview and focus group data from the exploratory phase of Proyecto Latin@, for the YPAR phase I employed a manual method in which I carefully read through the data with a highlighter and pen in order to identify themes that fell within the context of YPAR and transnational Latin@ feminism. During this process, I looked for frequent theme patterns and grouped them together. I then re-examined the data to determine how these groups of data figured into the overall picture of Proyecto Latin@. After this step, I realized that the three themes that I discuss in the next three chapters – the processes of self-identification as Latin@, community engagement, and transformative learning – occurred in a
scaffolding manner. In other words, the processes of self-identification needed to be initiated before identifying a community with which to engage. Through the processes of community engagement, the student-researchers embarked on learning that became transformative over time, even manifesting itself after the end of the Proyecto Latin@ course.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have recounted my beginnings in Proyecto Latin@ as a Graduate Assistant and have traced the project’s process throughout its two phases. I have presented each member of the adult research team and have provided brief introductions to each youth who will be named in the following chapters. I have also introduced the underpinnings of YPAR and how the adult research team practiced it *with* and *alongside* the students at UHS (Tuck, 2008). As a school-based project however, the adults have had to contend with various dilemmas and balancing acts; my own clashing of roles as a practicing TDSB teacher during the week and as a graduate student researcher on the weekend was a particularly challenging part of this work, especially in light of my concerns for demonstrating the validity of the credit course while

In the next three chapters, I will document the themes of self-identification as Latin@, community, engagement, and transformative learning as described by the youth who participated in Proyecto Latin@. While the next chapter involves data from both phases, the two that follow remaining true to the youth-centred foci of YPAR are specifically focused on the YPAR aspect of the project.
Chapter 4
Latinidades in flux:
Self-identification as Latin@ in Canada

Como mexicana pues ahí yo me catalogo latina ... así que soy latina. Me hace sentir feliz, orgullosa de mí misma, ¿no? O sea, venir de un país que hablan español, que nos comunicamos aquí entre nosotros, que a pesar de que somos nosotros de diferentes países, nos podemos comunicar. Nos entendemos.

[As a Mexican, well there I categorize myself as Latina ... so I am Latina. It makes me feel happy, proud of myself, right? In other words, coming from a Spanish speaking country, we can communicate with each other. Despite coming from different countries, we can communicate with each other. We understand each other.]

Noelia, May 2009

In the quote above, twelfth grader Noelia articulated her self-identification as Latin@. To rationalize such a declaration of self-identification, this soft-spoken student first emphasized that she is Mexican, which according to her is a national identification that would fall under the Latin@ label. She added that despite the categorization of different countries under the Latin@ label, the fact that the people in these countries are generally Spanish-speaking provides Latin@s with a linguistic connection that allows them to communicate and understand each other.

But how do students like Noelia, who self-identify as Latin@, come to conceptualize their latinidad and negotiate it in the space of Proyecto Latin@? What are the experiences and characteristics that shape these productions of latinidad and what are the parameters and criteria that determine the students’ declarations of belonging or non Belonging to the group as Latin@, particularly in the Canadian context? In consideration of the diversity amongst Latin@s in Canada, it is important to also consider how migration from Latin America has shaped conceptions of latinidad in Canada and, for the purposes of this study, in the Toronto context in particular. As we saw above, Noelia considers both her individual characteristics and the ways in
which these factors fit with those in the group that she identifies as Latin@. Noelia conceptualized *latinidad* as a transnational identification label; in her case, being Mexican and able to communicate in Spanish with people from other Spanish speaking countries grants her membership in the group as a Latin@.

This transnational view of *latinidad* is a complex process involving varying social and cultural practices that fuse together the different nations and cultures across Latin America (Davis, 2000). Noelia’s articulation of her identification as a Latina points to both her understanding of herself as a *mexicana* immigrant who, through the process of meeting and interacting with people from other Spanish speaking countries, also categorizes herself as Latin@ in Canada. As Roth (2012) argues, this transnational process of adopting the Latin@ label in the host country illustrates how migrants and their children can sometimes take up language, nationality, and geography in ways that create new ethnoracial schemas. Through a variety of transnational activities, multiple identification schemas, which Noelia introduces on national and pan-ethnic grounds, can co-exist and form a part of individuals’ self-identifications at the same time.

This process of conceptualizing *latinidad*, however, is not so clear cut among all the participants in Proyecto Latin@. While the students certainly did address commonalities with people that they considered Latin@ - like language and Latin American background – they also complicated the commonly held assumption that identification with *latinidad* entails simplistic ethnoracial, linguistic, and geographical terms. The students often expressed the notion that being Latin@ included identification with mestizaje and a gendered colonial history stemming from the intermixing of the Spanish with indigenous peoples beginning in the 15th century; however, they also emphasized that various other global movements including slavery and
migration affected Latin America, which in turn engendered other populations of Latin@s that differed from the indigenous-European binary (Mayer, 2004). As some of the students’ own reported genealogies illustrate, particularly those self-identifying as second generation Latin@s, *latinidad* comprises a much more complex label of self-identification that includes contested questions of race, ethnicity, gender, and phenotype. In the diasporic context of 21st century Canada, *latinidad*, as expressed by some of the students who participated in Proyecto Latin@, can include mixed ancestries that involve other geographical family origins in addition to Latin America.

An especially key factor in conversations about *latinidad* involved language and centred on Spanish, which continues to be the dominant language of Latin America. Despite the students’ general consensus that a Spanish-speaking background was an important factor in self-identifying as Latin@, they disagreed on whether this language background was a necessary criteria in determining *latinidad*.

In the paragraphs above, I have pointed out a variety of factors that shape the students’ processes of self-identification as Latin@ in the spaces of the Proyecto Latin@ study. Yet at the same time, it is also necessary to think about the roles that the interrelationships between the students and the researchers, all of whom – except for one researcher in the exploratory phase – identified in some way or another as Latin@. Central to the self-identification process that evolved within these interrelationships were both the life histories that were intertwined within them, access (or the lack thereof) to particular groups, the meanings that individuals ascribed to these encounters, and the ways in which these meanings were taken up in the group context (Deaux & Martin, 2003; Erickson, 1975).

Self-identification and feelings of belonging to a collective group, however, requires
external definition as well. In other words, for a collective group to exist, it is necessary that there be particular criteria that determine belonging – or not belonging – to that group. These criteria, which can include (but are not limited to) physical, linguistic, cultural, or geographical factors, require some degree of agreement within the pertinent group so that a collectivity can be conceptualized, both physically and psychically. In the case of this present study, the collective group was referred to by the students as “nosotros Latinos” – we Latin@s.

Despite this collective name, the students’ words revealed that self-identification as Latin@ comprised a complex set of processes that cut across various dimensions of time, language, geography, phenotype, and even gender. In this chapter, I will argue that the students’ self-identification as Latin@ in the space of Proyecto Latin@ was a fluid and highly contested social production often fraught with tensions and contradictions. Shaped both by individual and collective processes, the students’ self-identification as Latin@ involved the negotiation of various layers of identifications within the group contexts of their social environments. The differences as well as the similarities in the ways in which the students described their identifications and the roles that they played in their everyday lives is an important theme to examine more closely, particularly in the 21st century context of Canada. Such a modern day context is necessary to understand because it casts serious doubt on the notion that self-identifying as Latin@ is a process solely based on having Latin American and Spanish-speaking roots, which in some cases is determined through a Spanish surname (see Mayer, 2004).

In this chapter, I will organize my discussion around four key areas contested by the students: language, phenotype, geography, and gender. However, I must first clarify two concepts prior to engaging with the discussion of these four contested factors. Firstly, I will delineate the research team’s initial framing of latinidad during the recruitment as well as during
the data collection throughout the course of both phases. It is crucial that I lay out such
information so as to contextualize the social spaces involved in our work with the youth
described in this present study. With respect to the Proyecto Latin@ YPAR phase in particular,
we adult researchers were also participants in the work through the ways in which we worked
with the youth, including conversations about our own positionalities as Latin@s.

Secondly, I will discuss how the students engaged with the historical and colonial contexts of Latin America in their self-identification as Latin@. As I have already mentioned, the students expressed the notion that Latin@s comprise a culturally rich and hybrid group with over 500 years of shared histories beginning with the conquest, miscegenation and co-existence involving the Spanish, indigenous peoples, and African slaves. Additionally, the students extended these discussions of history, colonialism, and hybridity to more contemporary global movements, both in the Latin American and in the Canadian contexts, as factors that also figure into the diversity of Latin@s. When discussing his group’s concept map of the term “Latin@”, Mariano commented:

la cultura latina es tan grande, tan distinta, y tan rica ... mientras que todos piensan que
la única historia que tenemos es la mexicana. Sí, la historia mexicana es muy linda y muy
fuerte, tiene mucha presencia. Pero igual también hay muchas otras historias y culturas.
En mi familia hay una combinación de esclavos y gente que tenía tierra.

[Latin@ culture is very expansive, unique, and rich ... but in the meanwhile, everyone
thinks that the only history that we have is that of the Mexicans. Yes, Mexican history is
beautiful, strong, and has a great deal of presence. However, there are also many other
histories and cultures. In my family, there is a blend of slaves and landowners].

Here, Mariano recognizes that while Latin@s share a colonial heritage, they nonetheless
constitute a diverse pan-Latin@ group resplendent with a great diversity in cultures and histories. Like Mariano indicated, such diversities are apparent not only between countries, but also within countries and families. As such, he referred to Latin@s as an “expansive, unique, and rich” collective.

**Talking about *latinidad* in the YPAR Course**

As stated, the above conversation took place in a school/research space during times allocated to a credit course focusing on the experiences and perspectives of Latin@s. As YPAR practitioners responsible for delivering a credit course and yet committed to honouring the key principles of YPAR, we co-created curriculum with the students that was centred on their lived experiences as a Latin@ collective. At the same time, we participated in this Latin@ collective, whether through our use of the Spanish language or through our comments about our own identities as Latin@s. As such, we adult facilitators partook in framing *latinidad* in the space of the project and even through its name – Proyecto Latin@ - which the students chose to preserve when given the opportunity to create their own.

As a researcher in the project, I became a part of mobilizing *latinidad* as a marker of self-identification, both in terms of recruitment and in conducting the research itself. While the study was named Proyecto Latin@, the TDSB research that informed our work did not use the term “Latin@” to describe any of its students. In fact, the TDSB utilized geographical and linguistic terms to refer to the students, describing them as “Spanish speaking” or “from Latin American backgrounds”.

As I sat at my computer preparing the information flyers for the first phase, I wondered what would be the most appropriate and relevant way of recruiting students to participate in the
study and share their perspectives with us. How would the terms “Latin@”, “Spanish speaking”, and “Latin American” include or exclude potential participants? What about the students who had Latin American parents but who did not speak Spanish? Or the students with Latin American heritage as well as a family background from other parts of the world? The research team was interested in working with a wide range of participants who may self-identify Latin@, and as such, I drafted the flyer text in a way that extended beyond the TDSB’s linguistic and geographical categories of nomenclature. It read:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What are your thoughts on the educational experiences of Latin@s in Toronto’s public schools?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>If you:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>√ have Latin American background</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>√ identify yourself as Latina, Latino, Hispanic, and/or Spanish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>√ have at least one parent/caregiver who speaks Spanish at home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>then you are a perfect candidate for PROYECTO LATIN@.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These different markers of identification, which addressed geography, genealogy, the linguistic background of the students and/or their parents or caregivers, and other related labels, created a broad framework from which to begin the processes of self-identification. They also created a wide range of possibilities from which to initiate the process of identification as Latin@.

The flyers for the YPAR phase of Proyecto Latin@ contained similar language in terms of identification labels. However, the headline was more overt in labelling potential participants as Latin@, calling out to them as such through the usage of capital letters:
ATTENTION
LATINA & LATINO STUDENTS!

Do you:
√ identify yourself as Latina, Latino, Hispanic, and/or Spanish?
√ identify yourself as having Latin American roots or heritage?
√ want to make a difference in the education of Latina/o youths in Toronto schools?
√ want to be more involved in your community?

......

then you are a perfect candidate for PROYECTO LATIN@.

While the flyers in both phases initiated processes of self-identification with the Latin@ label and served as vehicle for compelling potential participants to come forward to find out more about our work, the multiple positionalities of the research team also worked to frame latinidad within the space of the project. In other words, our embodiment as Latin@s and our privilege as researchers – whatever that might mean to the students and the ways in which we talked about latinidad – influenced the students’ self-identification as Latin@ to a certain extent.

Institutionally, we were researchers conducting a study that was entitled Proyecto Latin@ and sanctioned by both the university and the school board. During the information sessions for both phases, we also used language that addressed the groups of students that we would work with on pan-Latin@ terms. When we met with the students during these meetings, we explicitly used the term Latin@ in explaining our work. Our terminology was further contextualized in the information letters and consent forms that we distributed to the students and their parents; while the term “Latin@” was utilized in the explanation of the study, the text included the phrase “Spanish speaking students of Latin American heritage”. In both phases of Proyecto Latin@, the forms and letters that we distributed were copied onto university letterhead, specifically that of the Centre for Urban Schooling. The combination of these factors – physical, linguistic, and institutional – afforded us with a certain degree of authority and access in creating research
environments that facilitated the students’ self-identifications as Latin@.

Two other factors that also worked to spur the students’ processes of self-identification as Latin@ were the phenotype and language usage of the research team. Appearance-wise, the members of the research team who collected the data in Proyecto Latin@’s exploratory phase were people of colour; we all had varying degrees of brown skin, dark hair, and dark eyes, which comprise phenotypic features that fit the prevalent imaginary of the mestiz@ (Alcoff, 2005). With the exception of the Research Officer, who was of mixed Native American and African American background, the research team members identified as having Latin American descent and spoke both English and Spanish. As mentioned in the methodology chapter, our ease of communicating in a combination of English and Spanish facilitated our access to the perspectives of the students and their opportunities to express themselves in the language of their preference.

In the YPAR phase of the project, which entailed weekly four-hour class meetings with the students, terminology and language played a key role in framing latinidad within the continuous group context of the space in which we conducted our work. For example, during the first few classes, the students engaged in two interrelated small group activities that centred on latinidad. While the first activity comprised word concept maps outlining the students’ perceptions of what it meant to be Latin@, the second activity entailed life-sized body maps illustrating the interactions between the external messages about Latin@s they encounter and the ways in which they internalize these messages. When the students presented their work to the entire class, more often than not they would talk about their work in a collective sense, using terms such as “nosotros los latinos” [us Latinos] and “nosotros somos” [we are], which in part is a product of the activity instructions.
Out of the four co-facilitators, three of us – myself, Rubén, and Mónica – were bilingual members of the research team in Proyecto Latin@’s exploratory phase and had developed a relationship with the school at which we would conduct our YPAR work. During the first phase at that school and in line with the general preference of the students, we usually used Spanish as the language of communication in the interviews and focus groups. Of course, a factor that is also important to consider here is that the majority of the students who participated in the study in that first phase were youth who predominantly spoke Spanish and who had immigrated to Canada in the previous 3 years.

When we commenced our YPAR work for the second phase, we were joined by teacher education candidate Elizabeth, who, like the three of us, identified as Latin@ and also spoke Spanish and English with fluency. The fact that all four of us were able to switch between English and Spanish and even combine them to speak what we called “Spanglish” allowed us to accommodate the linguistic needs of all the students. While we did use both languages in our YPAR work with the students, an analysis of the data reveals that Spanish was the dominant language of our research space, both in terms of the interactions between the students and the group at large as well as the work that they produced.

This is not to say, however, that the students across both phases consistently opined that speaking Spanish was a necessary requisite to self-identifying as Latin@. While they generally acknowledged that their Spanish speaking background united them as a Latin@ collective, they sometimes disagreed on the degree to which fluently being able to speak, read, and even write Spanish characterized a person claiming to be Latin@ as such. I will discuss some of these conversations later on in the section on language. Next, I will offer a discussion on the ways in which the students took up issues of colonialism and indigeneity and the ways in which they
figured – or did not figure – into their identifications as Latin@.

**Being Latin@: Conversations about Colonialism and a(n) (Non)Indigenous Past**

Susana, an outspoken twelfth grader who participated in both the exploratory and YPAR phases of Proyecto Latin@, was born in Mexico and arrived in Canada about three years before we first met her. Susana described herself as a Latina, specifically as a Mexican woman with an Otomi indigenous past, declaring that she is “mexicana de un área Otomí. Soy una mujer.” When Mónica – her interviewer – asked Susana to expand on her identification with the Otomi culture, she indicated that “Otomí es una cultura que estuvo en México. Como los Zapotecas, como los Aztecas, como los Mayas, había Otomía y yo soy de una región donde estaban los Otomís.” [Otomí is a culture that used to be in Mexico. Like the Zapotecs, like the Aztecs, like the Mayans, there were Otomi people. And I am from an area where the Otomis used to be.]

Despite the fact that the Otomi are a population that continue to exist in Mexico, Susana talked about her Otomi roots in the past tense (see Galinier, 1994; Quinto-Córtez et. al., 2010). While I cannot speculate on the reasons for the past verb tense in explaining who the Otomi people are or whether this verb tense usage was intentional, I did note that Susana proudly considered her Otomi roots as contemporary presence in her self-identification. She explained:

> Ah, pues a mí me da mucho orgullo porque, pues eran como que sabios, no se toda la cultura que tenían vera no tenía calculadora, no tenían nada y podían hacer todos eso cálculos. A pesar que tenían sus, como sus sacrificios y esas cosas sangrientas que a nadie le gusta eran personas bien sabias. Y yo creo si no hubieran llegado los españoles a invadir yo creo que ahorita seríamos una cultura bien grande. Sí, eran bien sabios todo
eso pero sí estoy bien orgullosa. A mí me, me fascina que me digan que soy mexicana india así.

[Well, I am very proud, because, they were like, wise, they did not have calculators or anything like that and yet they could make all those calculations. All this despite the fact that they had their, like, sacrifices and all those bloody things that people don’t like, they were very intelligent people. And I think that if the Spaniards had not come to invade us, we would be a very large culture. Yes, they were very wise and all that, but yes, I am very proud and I am delighted when others tell me that I am a Mexican indigenous person like that.]

Susana proudly articulated a schema of her Otomi ancestors that emphasized their intelligence and mathematical acuity. Within this framework, however, she added that the Otomi engaged in “sacrifices and all those bloody” acts – acts that she describes as the type that “people don’t like.” This comment raises the question of the prevailing European ideologies brought by the Spaniards, who not only viewed the sacrificial acts of the Otomi peoples with repugnance, but also exerted their power in decimating what Susana said would have been a flourishing culture (see Wynter, 1995). Through the usage of the present tense in determining that “people don’t like” the Otomi’s sacrificial acts, Susana also highlighted how Euro-Christian perspectives continue to wield their power as an enduring colonial imaginary extending centuries beyond the initial invasion of the Otomi “us” (Cornell & Hartmann, 2007). On the other hand, Susana disrupted these colonialist assumptions that cast the Otomi in unfavourable terms; she restored the memory of the Otomi’s glory not only by reclaiming their sagacity, but also her own indigenous roots. For her, these Otomi roots form a fundamental part of “nuestros países latinos” [our Latino countries] and her embodiment as a Mexican woman.
During an interview in Proyecto Latin@’s exploratory phase, Argentinean immigrant Roberto also expressed his belief that the Latin@ label carries connotations of an indigenous legacy. Because of this very notion of indigeneity, however, Roberto explicitly rejected any self-identification with the Latin@ name. When I asked the tenth grader to describe himself on ethnic terms, he immediately asserted that “first, firstly, I am not Latino. I come from Argentina. Um, I am descended from Europeans.” I must admit that I was taken aback by Roberto’s quick response, perhaps because I had not encountered anyone in the project who outright (and so quickly) rejected the Latin@ label. Intrigued with Roberto’s rejection of the Latin@ name for himself, I asked him to elaborate and to explain what being Argentinean meant to him:

Cristina: Okay. Háblame un poco de eso, o sea, tu, tu, ser argentino y no latino.

Roberto: Mmm. Em, lo que la gente tiene que entender es que no todos, no todas las personas que hablan castellano. Yo hablo castellano, no español. Em, lo que la gente tiene que entender es que no toda la gente que habla castellano español son latinos. Como por ejemplo, Argentina no es un país latino. Está en Sud América, pero eso no significa que es latino. Eh, Argentina es un país que primero, em, Argentina era un país que primero fue poblado por españoles y esos son europeos. Pero, pero um, mis ancestros son italianos. Sí. Em, así que vinieron, no son latino, latin, mi mamá me dijo, “Los latinos son gente de Centro, un poco de Sud América, que em, son españoles que se juntaron con los indígenas o los aborígenes que estaban aca”. Eh, eso es lo que me dijo a mí, no quiero generalizar. [underscore denotes emphasis]

[Cristina: Okay. Talk to me a bit about that. In other words, about your, you being Argentinean and not Latino.
Roberto: Mmm. Um, what people have to understand is that not all, not all people that speak Castillian … I speak Castillian, not Spanish. Um, what people have to understand is that not everyone who speaks Castillian Spanish are Latinos. Like for example, Argentina is not a Latino country. Eh, Argentina is a country that first, um, Argentina was a country that was first populated by Spaniards and they are Europeans. But, but um, my ancestors are Italian. Yes. Um, so they came. They are not Latino, Latin. My mom told me that “Latinos are people from Central, a bit of South America, that um, they are the Spaniards who got together with the indigenous or the Aboriginals that were here”. Eh, that is what she told me. I don’t want to generalize.]

For Roberto, being Latin@ carries historical ethnoracial and geographical connotations, connotations that carry a legacy of Spaniard settlers who “got with” indigenous people on Central and “a bit of” South American land. While he acknowledged that Argentina was indeed populated by Spaniards, he noted that his family is of Italian descent and thus has nothing to do with the intermixing between the Spaniards and the indigenous. By asserting that Argentina is not a Latin@ country, he also disassociated himself and his country from being a part of that “bit of” South American land populated by the Spaniards who “got with” the indigenous people. For Roberto, then, to be from Argentina was to be from a country that had no indigenous people!

While Roberto credited his mother with the ways in which he viewed and identified himself as an Argentinean, he also emphasized that knowledge of one’s historical lineage had an important role in this self-identification. He stated that it was important to know one’s roots and the knowledge that comes from such roots. For him, the knowledge encompasses the massive waves of immigration to Argentina from Italy that occurred during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Indeed, these Italian roots are very present in Argentina, as approximately 24 million
out of the 40 million people residing in the country have descendants from Italy (Salvatore, 2002). As Colantoni and Gurlekian (2004), “the Italian influence was so pervasive” in various aspects of Argentinean life and culture, and also involved tight relations between the “paesani” (fellow countrypeople), which included a preference for marriage between people of Italian descent (p. 116).

For Roberto then, being Argentinean meant having Italian roots, which clearly mapped an Argentina that is disassociated from the rest of South America and as such without the indigenous past that he learned about from his mother. In essence, his discourse of Argentineanness is one that is adamantly non-Latin@ and purely European, both in terms of genealogy and language. While this vision of Argentina could be the case in Roberto’s own family and in many other Argentinean families, what is to be said about the indigenous peoples and their descendants who trace their family roots to the Argentinean land? Here, Roberto has engaged in an ongoing colonial project that has placed the dominant settler-descended population at the centre of Argentinean-ness, which in turn cast the indigenous of Argentina out of his national Argentinean imaginary.

What do we make of Roberto’s assertion that he speaks Castilian and not Spanish? Neither he nor I experienced language comprehension issues when we spoke to each other during the interview. A review of the recordings and the transcripts from the focus groups in which Roberto participated did not reveal indications about any of the other students – who did self-identify as Latin@s and as Spanish speakers – experiencing language comprehension issues with his contributions to our conversations. Of course, regional variations in language should be considered, which include variations of factors such as vocabulary and language, which in turn are influenced by social contexts. With respect to Argentine Spanish, Colantoni and Gurlekian
(2004) point out what they term the “language contact hypothesis”; because of the high levels of Italian immigration to Argentina in the 19th and 20th centuries, the Spanish language spoken across the country has acquired a significant degree of Italian influence. When Argentines refer to their language as Castilian rather than Spanish, they make distinctions that are not only based on race and ethnicity, but also on perceived social class (Colantoni, personal communication, September 7, 2012). Moreover, towards the beginning of our interview Roberto, was adamant that “no, no soy pobre [no, I am not poor] ... because I come from South America ... [T]he main reason for moving to Canada was because of the economic crisis in Argentina” in the early 2000s.

By maintaining that he speaks Castilian rather than Spanish and through his insistence that he neither was nor is presently poor, Roberto maintained his European bourgeoisie privilege over the Latin@s, who he described as the descendants of indigenous peoples. In addition to being the descendant of Italians, Roberto also emphasized that he spoke the Spanish of the Spaniards – Castilian – thus distancing himself even further from the Latin@s, who according to him spoke a different kind of Spanish.

“El español nos une” – Unity through the Spanish Language – But in What Ways?

Generally, the students across both phases of Proyecto Latin@ shared Noelia’s perspective, quoted at the beginning of this chapter, that the Spanish language unites people with family histories across the Spanish speaking countries of Latin America. Indeed, this view of Spanish as a unifying factor was cited by the students both pointing to a shared colonial past and a present that perpetuates different levels of marginalization stemming from that colonial past.

32 Roberto overlooks the fact that many Latin@ immigrants were actually professionals in their home countries. On the other hand, through his assertions that he is not Latino and not poor, he may be suggesting that all Latin@s are poor, even if they are professionals.
Mariano, for instance, noted that the widespread imposition and subsequent adoption of Spanish by the peoples of the Latin American continent have rendered it a language that is associated with an indigenous past involving conquest that continues to the present. For Mariano, this prevailing conquest over Latin@s continues through the ways in which institutional agents like law enforcement officers mark them as savage Others that need to be restrained. During a conversation about the ways in which institutions and policies in Canada marginalize Latin@s, he explained that:

we speak Spanish, and because of that, they mark us as indigenous. No, I am not saying that that is anything bad, but rather that they position us in a part of history ... they mark us so they can pick us... They see your name, [imitating police] Mariano García Ramírez, “come here.”

Despite the students’ critiques of the enduring European domination over their lived experiences, it was interesting to note how the students used the term “Spanish” interchangeably with the Latin@ label. Even in instances in which we researchers utilized the term “Latin@”, the students sometimes employed “Spanish” as a pan-Latin@ term of identification. During a group task in which the students were asked to map the different ethnic and racial group presences at their school, I approached Mariano’s group to ask him and his peers about their knowledge of who is Latin@ at their school. I specifically asked Mariano: “How do you guys know who is Latin@ and then stick together? Like you said, you can’t always see who is Latin@.” Mariano answered that it is the “movement” of the Spanish language, recounting his own experiences as a self-identified “Spanish” person. He explained that this open self-identification as a Spanish speaking person provided him with membership into the Latin@ group at his school. He asserted that:
People look at me and ask: “What is this white dude doing with Martín?” Right? So people will be like, “Where you from?” And I’m like, “From Colombia.” And they’re like, “Oh yeah, Spanish! Yo, bro!”

Intrigued by this response, both Mónica (the course instructor) and I asked the group whether their peers’ reaction would differ if they did not speak the language. Would they have still been able to self-identify and be accepted as Latin@? In response, Mariano, David, and Miguel all stated that having Spanish speaking roots trumps language proficiency because such linguistic origins form an integral part of Latin@ culture:

Mariano: You’re Latin. It doesn’t really matter.

David: [laughing] As long as you’re Spanish!

Mariano: As long as you’re Spanish, yeah.

Cristina: But what makes you Spanish?

Miguel: It’s your culture, right? … With the Spanish guy, if you understand his culture, you understand better why he does the things he does.

Mariano: And you act a certain way, you were raised in a different way.

Through this exchange, Mariano, David, and Miguel extended the meaning of the term “Spanish” to also denote identification, culture, and learned social behaviour regardless of language ability or generational status. In saying “as long as you’re Spanish,” David and Mariano addressed borderlands theorist Norma González’s (2001) question about second and subsequent generation Latin@s. In her work, González specifically asked what is to be said about the children who do not speak Spanish, the students who “have had their Spanish erased by English only schooling? Can one be Latino without speaking Spanish?” (p.xx). Or, as the question may be below, can one be “Spanish” without speaking Spanish?
According to Candace, whose mother is Anglo Canadian and whose father is Bolivian, one can certainly be considered “Spanish” or “Latin@” without speaking Spanish. This curly haired blonde female student with blue eyes was proud to self-identify as Latin@, but because of both her “white” looks and her inability to speak Spanish, she shared that she often encountered disbelief and commentaries such as “You’re a white girl.” During a focus group conversation, in which the students discussed the notion of the wanna-be as a “person who wants to be something they’re not,” Candace shared her frustration in continuously having to contend with others’ resistance to her self-identification as Latin@. Unlike Mariano, the “white” Spanish-speaking Colombian immigrant, Candace was Canadian-born and unable to speak Spanish. When I interviewed her later that week, Candace reiterated her frustration with having to continuously explain her Latin@ identification, stating that “people don’t really know me, but then again, I can’t speak the language”.

Nonetheless, Candace was adamant about asserting her Latin@ self-identification and demystifying the widespread assumption that all Latin@s speak Spanish. She told me that “everybody thinks like, if you're Latino, you have to speak Spanish, and that's not true. Like, you don’t have to speak Spanish to be Latino.” Candace’s insistence on her right to assert her latinidad and to be accepted as such closely mirrors the concerns of second and subsequent generation Chicana scholars in the U.S. in terms of negotiating the spaces and circumstances that attempt to exclude them because they are monolingual English speakers (Barrientos, 2004; Bejarano, 2005). While Candace and the other youth who participated in the study did agree that a Spanish speaking background is often a key factor in self-identification as Latin@, they disagreed on the necessity of actually speaking Spanish in order to self-identify and be recognized as such. As Latin@s in Canada are increasingly intermarrying with other ethnoracial
groups, it will become important to conduct further research on the ways in which their children navigate their social spaces and self-identify (or do not self-identify) as Latin@ and the factors through which they determine their self-identifications.

The topic of whether the ability to speak Spanish in order to self-identify and be recognized as Latin@ yielded a heated debate in another focus group, which comprised a group of students who were mostly Canadian born. As we shall see in the excerpt below, the question of whether one must be able to speak Spanish in order to self-identify as Latin@, or as the students here put it – “Spanish” – is a very contentious one:

Cristina: Okay. And me too. Okay. I was born here. Um, I lived in the area. [area name] For my whole, yeah, um, until, just a few years ago. Okay? When I moved, but, what I’m saying, does, okay, you guys all being born here, does that mean that you’re, less Latino?

All (in separate voices): No.

....

Ana María: No. Spanish. They’re mostly people that can’t speak Spanish.

Cristina: Okay. So?

Luis: You can understand it but you can’t speak it.

Rita: My cousin can’t speak it.


Ana María: It wouldn’t like make a difference. It’s like just ‘cause you can’t speak it it doesn’t mean you’re not Spanish.

Catrina: Yeah.

Cristina: So what makes you Latino?

Rita: I disagree with them. I say if you speak Spanish you’re Spanish. If you don’t speak
Spanish then you’re not Spanish.

While the students did not expand on the level of proficiency required to be deemed to be able to speak Spanish, they brought up two other components of language competence – reading and writing – as additional criteria in the determination of who is Latin@ or “Spanish”:

Ana María: If you can’t write Spanish or read it, you don’t consider yourself Spanish, Rita?

Rita: Man, I can read and write stuff.

Ana María: No, no one said you can’t read or write. No one said that. I’m just asking. If you can’t read Spanish or write it, (Catrina: And you’re from Guatemala.) how do you consider yourself Spanish?

…

Cristina: … Alright, so, yeah, we were talking about the speaking, right? And you were saying, yes, it’s important. Um, and then the reading and writing came up. Does that matter?

Luis: Somewhat.

Ana María: Somewhat. Yeah.

The students’ conversation on the role of language and ethnolinguistic self-identification is reminiscent of Portes and Rumbaut’s (2001) argument that language plays a central role in the preservation of how one sees oneself ethnolinguistically and culturally. Campbell and Rogalin (2006) also make a similar argument, pointing out their findings that language does indeed play a key role in the ethnic and racial self-identification processes of Latin@s. Tran (2010) adds an additional dimension to the role of language, particularly among second-generation Latin@s,
through his contention that “school and neighbourhood contexts matter … [P]roximity to ethnic enclaves and access to a co-ethnic community tend to support parental language maintenance” (p. 263).

Although the above named works are U.S. studies, the points raised are nonetheless pertinent to this Canadian analysis. With the exception of Catrina, who arrived in Canada as a toddler, all the students in this particular focus group reported their Canadian nativity. Moreover, the school that these students attended at the time of the focus group session is located in an area of Toronto that has been populated by significant numbers of Latin@s – particularly Ecuadoreans and Salvadoreans – since the 1970s (Veronis, 2006). Many of the Latin@ immigrants who settled in the area continue to live there along with their Canadian born children. At the same time, the area continues to be a major receiving neighbourhood for immigrants, including those from Latin America. In this area in particular, then, there are sizeable numbers of both immigrant Latin@s, second generation Latin@s, and an emerging third generation (Carillos, personal communication, January 2009). The students were adamant that although they are Canadian-born, they are nonetheless Latin@; through their demonstrated language competence, they can assert their Latin@ identification. This displayed language proficiency was especially necessary to maintain their ethnolinguistic identification in an area with sizeable numbers for both immigrant and Canadian-born Latin@s, particularly since (according to the students) the former often derided the latter’s self-identification labels as Latin@. Rita, for instance, revealed such rivalries between immigrant and second-generation Latin@s at her school, calling the former “haters” who “act like they are the biggest thing.” Her peers joined in the conversation and shared similar perspectives:

Ana María: And when they speak in Spanish in front of the people.
Catrina: Like if we don't know any Spanish at all.

Rita: Because we weren't born back home, we don't speak it, they think we don't know anything.

Here, the students passionately decried the assumptions that because their Canadian nativity meant that their “home was Canada and as such they did not speak Spanish. Indeed, it appeared that such assumptions about Canadian-born Latin@s were widespread; I heard similar perspectives about second-generation Latin@s from Walter, who attended a different high school in Toronto. While this student was actually born in Canada, he lived in El Salvador for most of his childhood and differentiated himself from other second-generation Latin@s. During my interview with him, Walter explained that that unlike the Salvadorean youth in the neighbourhood in which the above focus group took place, he felt that along with his brother, he was “the only [Salvadorean student] with strong Spanish speaking skills. Because … there are many Salvadoreans here but they only speak English.”

In consideration of perspectives like Walter’s and the social context of the Canadian-born students in the above focus group, it is no wonder that they harboured strong sentiments towards “proving themselves” as Latin@s through their Spanish language competency. These perceived rivalries, however, created what Conchas (2001) terms “distinct Latino subcultures” – or rather, groups that experience tensions as they attempt to negotiate their place as Latin@s. (p. 485).

**What do Latin@s Look Like?: Conversations about Phenotype**

Conversations about *latinidad* during both phases of Proyecto Latin@ also focused on phenotype. While many commentaries about the hybridity and diversity of Latin@s addressed racial mixing stemming from the intermixing between Europeans and indigenous peoples during
the fifteenth century contact, the students recognized that these binary white-indigenous conceptions of *latinidad* were limited in scope. In a focus group conversation from the first phase, for instance, the students pointed out that Latin@s represented an array of phenotypic features, not just the stereotypical “brown” image that was prevalent in the media and in the public imaginary. The students in the focus group noted that “[t]here is, there is everything … dark people and white people, even in El Salvador, there are like dark, dark people and there are some white people.”

During the above conversation, Catrina recounted her initial reaction upon seeing a “darker and darker and darker” man on the bus in Guayaquil, Ecuador’s largest city. As a fellow person of Ecuadorean descent, I told her that Ecuador does have a province populated by many Afro-Ecuadoreans – Esmeraldas. This inclusion of Esmeraldas into our conversation helped to expand the notion of the Latin@ to include the descendants of African slaves, which in turn ruptured their silencing in the prevalent conceptions of the Latin@ as solely an indigenous-European hybrid.

As Medina Vallejo (2006) has pointed out, a small group of African slaves first landed in Ecuador in 1553 when they escaped captivity en route from Panama to Peru. Additional groups of African slaves were also brought by Jesuits from Europe to labour in the Andean region’s sugar cane and tobacco fields, creating another enclave in the Chota-Mira Valley (Klaiber, 2004; Lara, 2011). However, because Afro-Ecuadorean peoples in Ecuador tend to be concentrated in such thinly populated areas far from the country’s major populations, they have often remained invisible to the rest of the Ecuadorean population. Yet, as Catrina stated, they are very visible when they enter spaces such as Guayaquil, which is predominantly populated by mestiz@s.
Despite the fact that Catrina quickly accepted the man on the bus in Guayaquil as an Ecuadorean, she admitted that she was incredulous when discovered that Marco – a student that she describes as “really dark” – identified as a “Latino Moreno.” Like her peer Linda, who commented that “at school everyone flipped” when they found out that he was from Ecuador and spoke Spanish, she too had previously thought that he was “African, Jamaican or something.”

What is interesting to note here is that in contrast to the cases of Candace and Mariano, who encountered resistance and incredulity when they asserted their latinidad, Marco was more quickly accepted as a Latin@. Of course, the students admitted their initial surprise, especially because they assumed that Marco was part of what second generation Ecuadorean student Luis described as a “majorly black” student population. Nonetheless, the students welcomed him into their Latin@ group as their “naño,” which means “brother” or “friend” in Ecuadorean Spanish. To them, Marco was Latin@, even though he looked like and was often perceived as a member of the school’s African Canadian student body. Such hybridity in conjunction with the demographic context of the school in particular also facilitated Marco’s self-identifications and membership into both ethnoracial groups (see Xu, Shim, Lotz & Almeida, 2004).

The same group of students returned to the issue of whiteness and latinidad, stating that “passing” as white often created situations of incredulity regarding their self-identification as Latin@s. Rita, for example, emphasized that she and her sister Ana María “don't look Spanish. We look whites, yeah Canadians”. Curious about how they navigated their “white look,” I specifically asked them whether or not they revealed their ethnolinguistic background to others. I was especially interested in hearing how they self-identified:

Cristina: Okay. Yeah. Talk to me about that. Do you guys ever say what you are?

Rita: Yeah, yeah, yeah, because I'm eww, I’m not proud to be Canadian ... white people.
Ana María: [pointing to the bracelets on her wrist] Did you see the bracelets? Look at all those bracelets! [laughs]

Cristina: Yes, ya me di cuenta [I already noticed]. Okay. It says Guatemala. So what do you wanna … ¿Pero cómo te reacciona la gente when you say “we are guatemaltecas? [But how do people react when you say “we are Guatemalans”?]

Rita: They’re like, “Oh really? I thought you were white. I thought you were Polish”! [laughs] It’s like, oh come on, Polish?!

Despite having the “look” to engage in what Kanuha (1999) terms “passing,” Rita and Ana María explicitly rejected the “white Canadian” label, which in their discourse included ethnic whites from European countries. Their construction of whiteness, then, was not only Anglo white but all white, including European white (Guess, 2006). In the space and place of Proyecto Latin@ and in consideration of the ethnic and racial populations of their school, Rita and Ana María viewed being mistaken for “white Canadian” as something to “eww” at. They even went as far as differentiating themselves from the “white people” and asserting themselves as Guatemalans through their bright blue and white Guatemala bracelets. In excitedly asking me whether I had seen their bracelets, the girls appeared to seek further validation and acknowledgement of their latinidad, which in turn would bolster their rejection of a particular kind of “white Canadian” whiteness.

But what happens when someone with actual “white Canadian” roots also has Latin@ roots and self-identifies as Latin@? Here, I return to Candace, the blonde Bolivian-Canadian student described earlier in this chapter. When I asked her to detail the challenges that she faced as a Latin@ student, she emphasized her experiences being at odds with others regarding her
self-identification not only because of her Canadian-sounding first and last name, but also because of her whiteness. She indicated that the fact that she does “not really look like your average Latina girl” led others to react with incredulity when she “come[s] out” as a Latin@.

Intrigued with what she had to say on the topic, I asked her to expand on her comment:

Cristina: Why is that?

Candace: You see because people think dark skin, dark hair, dark eyes. That's how people think Latina, so when people--when I come out--like when I talk to other Latinas they think, "Oh you're not Spanish da da da," I'm like, "Yeah I am, like you know!" But like my fr--like my actual Latina friends? From my area they know where I live and they come to my house they see my parents they know I am Latina, so they know but like people--like it's hard to fit in sometimes with Latina groups 'cause they're like, "Oh!" Um, 'cause you know some Latinas they--they--they'll talk to you, no matter what, whatever, but it's like they won't think that you're Latina too. I don't know it's just like I wish like, I could like fit in more with them.

Cristina: How would you fit in more, I mean?

Candace: Like if I actually looked like a Latina. I don't mean like to, for me to change my appearance or whatever 'cause I wouldn't do that. … Some are like, "Oh, you're not, you're not Spanish," I'm like, "Yeah I am," that's like the same thing like they always think I'm not Spanish but then I say, "Yeah I am, like you know!"

While Candace declared that she did not look like the “average Latina girl,” she continuously asserted that “yeah I am [Latina] you know!” Here, we see how people’s suspicion of Candace’s assertions of latinidad cast her whiteness as a fixed and unchangeable feature that could not and did not allow her to experience marginalization as Latin@ (Bonnett, 1999;
Satzewich, 2000). Yet, at the same time, these instances of disbelief constituted instances of exclusion, which in essence silenced Candace’s identification with *latinidad*. To a certain degree, Candace assuaged people’s suspicions and disbelief by explaining that because her father is Bolivian, she is “Spanish”: “I say I am Spanish, my dad's from Bolivia, I say I'm half Spanish.”

Interested in how “half-ness” played out in Candace’s self-identification, I asked her whether being half-Bolivian still led her to identify as Latin@. She answered with a quick and resounding “yeah”. Additionally, her assertion that she was also “half” pointed to her multiple national and ethno-cultural identifications. These conversations on multiple identifications lead us to the next section, in which I will discuss the increasingly transnationalism of *latinidad* in Canada and the ways in which it is extending outside of Latin America-Canada movements to include other countries around the world.

**Transnational *latinidad* in Canada:**

**Extending beyond Latinoamérica and to the Rest of the World**

The notion of the Latin@ in the Canadian context differs from that of the United States, mainly because of a much shorter history of (im)migration from Latin America as well as a differing demographic composition. As the following discussions will demonstrate, the migration experience, whether the students’ own or those of their family members, brought about complicated themes of border-crossing – both physical and non-physical – between the homeland(s) and the host-land, in this case Canada. As the students engaged in dialogues pertaining to transnationalism and provided us with different perspectives on the roles of ethnicity, race, language, and genealogy in their articulation of their own *latinidad*, they opened up a new and different domain of border-crossing that extended beyond the notion of
immigration and into the notion of diaspora (Blanc, Basch, & Schiller, 1995; Itzigsohn, 2008; Vertovec, 1999). In the 21st century context of Canada, which involves “diasporic flows that produce encounters between different groups of people” (Gaztambide-Fernández & Guerrero, 2010, p. 9), it is crucial to examine how these encounters shape the ways in which individuals develop their sense of identification.

Such multilayered notions of latinidad point to the importance of conceptualizing self-identification as Latin@ beyond the ethnic, cultural, and linguistic practices that have intertwined with each other during the 500 years since the Spanish conquest of the Americas. As Gaztambide-Fernández and Guerrero (2010) point out, thinking and theorizing on Latin@s in Canada requires a consideration of mixed national backgrounds and ethnoracial parentage extending beyond Latin America and the rest of the Spanish speaking world. Numerous students across both phases of Proyecto Latin@, particularly in the first phase, reported that they also had European, Middle Eastern, and, as we just saw in Candace’s case, Anglo-Canadian heritage.

Of course, what also must be considered are the migration movements to Latin America from other parts of the world prior to migration to Canada. One of the students who participated in the YPAR phase, a tenth grader named Guillermo, immigrated to Canada from Uruguay. Because his grandfather was Italian, however, he had Italian citizenship as well and thus possessed an Italian passport. Despite this Italian ancestry and in contrast to the case of Roberto, who emigrated from neighbouring Argentina and who also had Italian lineage, Guillermo engaged with his peers using the Spanish language. Indeed, in the conversation about who is Latin@ or Spanish with Mariano and his peers during the school mapping activity, Miguel motioned towards Guillermo, who was sitting at another table, and admitted that he “did not know that [Guillermo] was Spanish.” Yet, because he spoke Spanish, came from a South
American country and was engaging in collaborative work on their collective challenges as Latin@s, they accepted him as such.

How do people react when an individual declares her *latinidad* but wears a hijab and speaks Arabic and not Spanish? Such factors were the case for Salma, who at first glance would be cast as Muslim and not Latin@. While Salma was indeed a practising Muslim, she was also proud of her Colombian background, even thought it would “take a good five minutes to explain everything.” When Rubén asked her how she described herself ethnically, she went back three generations to explain her mixed family heritage:

I'd say, um, like three quarters Lebanese and a quarter Colombian… My, well my mom, she's half Colombian because, well my grandpa let's say is--put it this way, my grandpa married a Colombian woman. So she was half-half, but um, since um my grandma converted, they mostly taught my mom uh, like the Muslim culture, uh the language of Arabic, but at the same time they'd also put in a bit of Spanish there. And then, yeah, my mom got married to a Lebanese man.

In this explanation, Salma brought up the topics of migration, inter-ethnic relationships, and religion as some of the multiple factors figuring into her self-identification with *latinidad*. Later in the interview, she shared with Rubén that she often got “the big eyes” and comments like “Really?” whenever she declared her “quarter Spanish” background, because of the ways in which people read her as Muslim by virtue of her hijab.

Two important lessons emerge from thinking about Salma’s *latinidad*. Firstly, she represents an emerging *latinidad* that involves mixed ancestry from other parts of the world, which in her case is the Middle East. Her heritage, then, takes the notion of hybridity to extend beyond the commonly held conceptions of indigenous-European mestizaje. Secondly, Salma’s
wearing of the hijab, which is a marker of her Muslim identity, ruptures with the prevalent imaginaries of the Catholic Latin@, whose indigenous-European ancestry and religion have transcended from the times of the Spaniard conquest. Here, Salma has shown that *latinidad* encompasses not only variances in language, religion, and national ancestry, but also a vast diversity in migration histories. Her family’s history, which can be traced from Lebanon, to Colombia, and – in the case of her immediate family – to Canada, is indicative of the ways in which *latinidad* in this country can involve multiple migration sites and stories.

María Fernanda’s story is yet another example of mixed *latinidades* in the Canadian context. This student, who had a mother from El Salvador and a father was from Portugal, put significant effort into asserting her identification as Latin@ and embracing the gendered stereotypes of Latin@ females in particular, especially when she was among her schoolmates. In the following interview excerpt, she described her own fluid transnational discourse of *latinidad* and the ways in which her social contexts shaped her self-identification as Latin@. Below, María Fernanda explained her “kinda weird” experiences with her ethnic identifications and sense of belonging when she switched schools:

María Fernanda:  ... I feel kinda weird sometimes.

Cristina:  Why?

María Fernanda:  ’Cause like some--like in my other school, I was like in a class, with a whole bunch of Spanish people, ’cause my other school was Spanish and Portuguese, and I'm both so it was okay, right?

Through the above words, María Fernanda indicated how she had ample opportunities to manifest her ethnic attachments to both her parents’ backgrounds at her former school. Her present school, on the other hand, was populated by a student body that did not include many
students of Portuguese descent. However, the school did have large numbers of Latin@ students, and this was an ethnic group to which María Fernanda expressed an attachment. Because María Fernanda had only mentioned her Portuguese father in passing and always identified with El Salvador and being a “Salvatrucha” in both our interview and in the focus groups, I was curious about how she navigated her Portuguese-ness at her present school:

Cristina: Do you ever um, talk about you being Portuguese?

María Fernanada: No.

Cristina: No? Why?

María Fernanada: 'Cause I don't know, if you're telling people that you're like half or something they call you like a half-breed or something like that.

Cristina: Do they ever say that to you?

María Fernanada: Sometimes.

Cristina: Who's Portuguese?

María Fernanada: My dad.

In both school contexts, María Fernanda discussed how her “experiences with co-ethnics [shaped her] ethnic self-identification” (Tovar & Feliciano, 2009, p. 203). At her first school, her continuous daily experiences with both Latin@ and Portuguese co-ethnics prompted her to feel a sense of belonging to both groups. At her second school, on the other hand, her limited interactions with people of Portuguese descent and her increased contact with other Latin@s, particularly those of the second generation, led her to distance herself from her Portuguese-ness and avoid being singled out as a “half-breed.” Of course, it must also be considered that María
Fernanda’s perspectives on *latinidad* were expressed within the context of Proyecto Latin@ and in a space populated by significant numbers of Latin@s in her age group.

During the interview, María Fernanda opened up about how she manifests her *latinidad* through her clothing. In the section that follows, I detail the key highlights of that part of our conversation as they relate to gender and how latinidades are expressed through gendered performances.

**“She can pull it off because she’s Spanish”: Gendered *latinidades***

María Fernanda added a gendered dimension to the ways in which she self-identifies as Latin@, or in her words, as “Spanish”. For her, being Latin@ did not only entail being able to speak in Spanish, but also the ability to look “so Spanish.” She explained that “when you dress a certain way they’re like, ‘Oh, you’re so Spanish’.” Not wanting to assume that dressing “so Spanish” mirrored the stereotypical gendered images of females that are prevalent in mainstream media, I asked her what it meant to dress in such a manner:

Cristina: What does it mean to dress so Spanish?

María Fernanda: Like, dressing good and stuff right?

Cristina: And what's good? What kind of clothes are those? I don't...?

María Fernanda: I don't know like, like, if [Cristina: Certain stores... or brands?] I was let's say like um, like Nandita, like Indian or something, people when she wore a skirt, they used to say, "Why are you wearing a skirt"? Right? But when I wore a skirt, mine skirt was even shorter than hers right? And they would say, "Oh you can't wear it, but she can wear it because she's Spanish. She can pull it off and you can't."

Cristina: What?
María Fernanda: Yeah. They, they just like, there's certain things that Spanish people can do that other races can't, 'cause they can't supposedly they can't pull it off. … they can wear like, you know, stuff that, that are tight, I guess, the type of shirts like you know the ones that go here—


María Fernanda: Um yeah stuff like that. Like we can pull it off and people won't say anything to us. But other people, they, like in my school if they see them they're like, "That girl's like a slut or something".

For María Fernanda, being a Latin@ female and self-identifying as such also meant embodying and performing gender characteristics that are perceived by others as being “so Spanish.” In this instance, she engaged in the act of “doing gender” in a way that she felt was prescribed by her social context (West & Zimmerman, 1987). Because she was viewed and viewed herself as Latin@, she was expected to and did wear short and tight clothing without inciting criticism. On the other hand, girls from “other races,” like her friend Nandita, were unable to do so without risking being called “a slut or something.” As an Indian girl, Nandita was expected to conform to gender performances and roles representing her Indian-ness, which according to María Fernanda, were neither sensualized nor revealing. Here, María Fernanda implied that while she was culturally prescribed to wear short and tight clothing as a Latin@, Nandita’s Indian body was policed and expected to conform to what Das Gupta (1998) terms “culturally significant” notions of “old-world [Indian] gender ideologies and clearly dichotomized gender roles” (p. 956).

While María Fernanda presented a provocative and sexualized adult image of the Latin@ female that she embraced and performed, she seemingly contradicted this image by discussing
how she “act[ed] like a little girl” to obtain the favour of her family members, her peers, and her teachers. As we talked about the notion of being a “little girl” at a local McDonald’s, her friend Luis passed by and comments “’[c]ause yo, she looks like a young girl yo. I mean miss”. As a “little girl,” María Fernanda acted and was perceived as vulnerable and in need of the protection of male others. Through this gendered and contradictory representation of her image and the ways in which she navigated her interactions with others, María Fernanda self-exoticized herself through a trope that inscribed her Latin@ body as a site onto which patriarchal notions of Latin@ femininity are reinforced (Arrizón, 2006). For her, however, this exoticized imaginary was her reality, one that she both celebrated and embraced, which at the same time was the way through which she claimed her latinidad.

While María Fernanda engaged in celebratory discourses of sexualized latinidad, other students were quick to contest such perspectives. In one incident during the YPAR phase, for instance, a group of students challenged stereotypes that cast Latino males as womanizers and stressed the need for debunking such conceptions. During a group presentation of the body maps, Mónica noted that one of them included a sticky note on the outside of the body outline that read “Latinos are players”. An interesting conversation ensued when she asked the group about it:

Mónica: Un minutico. Tengo una pregunta. Aquí dice “Latinos are players.” Why did you put that there? … Does anyone feel like putting an answer to it?

Martín: Dice que “Latinos are players” porque supuestamente, los latinos son mujeriegos, supuestamente.

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33 As is stated in the methodology chapter, the purpose of the body maps is to indicate external messages and stereotypes about Latin@s on the outside of the body outline and the ways in which these messages are internalized on the inside. Please see the methodology chapter for a photograph exemplar.
Linda: ¡Supuestamente! Son mujeriegos.

[The whole class reacts, saying “Ohhhhhhh” and chatters out loud.]

Martín: No.

Linda: ¿Cómo que no? Son mujeriegos.

Yadira: Es un estereotipo, porque todos no son mujeriegos.

Linda: Pues todos que he conocido son mujeriegos.

Yadira: Es un estereotipo muy malo y tenemos que cambiar eso.

Linda: Ay, ¿cómo que no?

[Mónica: Just a minute. I have a question. Here it says that “Latinos are players”. Why
did you put that there? … Does anyone feel like putting an answer to it?]

Martín: It says that “Latinos are players” because supposedly Latinos are womanizers,
supposedly.

Linda: Supposedly! They are womanizers!

[The whole class reacts, saying “Ohhhhhhh” and chatters out loud.]

Martín: No.

Linda: What do you mean? They are womanizers.

Yadira: That’s a stereotype, because not all [men] are womanizers.

Linda: Well, all [the Latino men] that I have known are womanizers.

Yadira: That’s a very bad stereotype and we need to change it.

Linda: Ay, what do you mean by no?

Here, Mónica’s question generated a great deal of student commentary and disagreement
regarding the stereotypes of Latin@ males as womanizers, even among some of the female
students. While Linda appealed to her own anecdotal evidence to conclude that Latino males are
womanizers, Yadira countered that such a point of view constituted a stereotype that needed to be changed. While there is a binary between the gendered perceptions of Latin@ males and females that cast the former as virile and the latter as doltish and submissive, there is nonetheless a discourse about both groups that pathologizes both as overtly hypersexual.

Later in the conversation, Mariano shared that his upbringing in a predominantly female family socialized him in a way that led him to question the oppressive nature of patriarchal ideologies and practices. When it came to *latinidad* in particular, patriarchy was evident in the Spanish language. As Mariano indicated:

*A nosotros los hombres latinos, tanta gente nos ven con el estereotipo latino que somos violentos, machistas, que queremos una novia pero con cinco atrás. Sí hay hombres así, pero todos no somos así ... Tengo el orgullo de haber nacido en una familia de mujeres, ... de ser un caballero para hacer sentir bien a la mujer... Pero venimos de una cultura muy machista, el idioma es machista. Cuando hay más mujeres y un hombre, son ellos.*

[Many people view us Latin@ men with the Latin@ stereotypes of us as violent, machista, and that we want a girlfriend along with five others. There are men like that, but we are not all like that … I have the pride to have been born into a family of women, … and to be a gentleman who treats women well … But we do come from a very chauvinistic culture; our language is sexist. When there are more women and one man, it’s [the male form of ] “they”].

Despite this expressed *caballeresmo* (gentlemanly-ness) with his female counterparts and his acknowledgement of the sexist implications of what he calls a “chauvinistic culture,” Mariano also recognized the societal pressures to conform to particular gendered behaviours, indicating that “*tenemos ... que somos la base de la casa, tenemos que traer el dinero* [we have to … be the
foundation of the household, we have to bring home the money”). Here then, Mariano expressed an ambivalence about machismo, indicating that it is oppressive but at the same time a societal test of manlihood (Ariciniega, Anderson, Tovar-Blank, & Tracey, 2008).

What is interesting from the exchange stemming from Mónica’s question about the sticky note with the statement “Latinos are players” is the fact that while men of all ethnoracial backgrounds engage in womanizing behaviour, there exists a prevailing stereotype that positions the Latino male as a being who cannot control his sexual prowess (Liang, Salcedo, & Miller, 2011). For both Mariano and Martín, such a stereotype requires a great deal of contextualization, unpacking, and negotiation, particularly when it is explicitly attached to Latin@ males and self-identifying as such.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have engaged in a discussion on four different dimensions through which the Proyecto Latin@ participants conceptualized and negotiated their self-identification as Latin@. These four dimensions are language, phenotype, geographical background, and gender.

As I have outlined earlier, there were several different perspectives on the degrees to which fluency in the Spanish language constituted a requisite to being Latin@ in Canada. The very question of language ability was especially contentious in the cases in which significant numbers of immigrant Latin@s co-existed in the same spaces as Canadian-born Latin@s.

While the students themselves acknowledged that Latin@s constituted a phenotypically diverse group, they also recognized that they possessed their own biases when attempting to determine who was or who was not Latin@. Such biases were especially problematic for the students who did not fit the stereotypical image of the tanned and dark-eyed Latin@. Oftentimes,
these students were those who either were the children of mixed parentage or whose families had a prior history of migration to Latin America from other parts of the world.

While the migration histories of families like those of students like Guillermo and Salma highlight the evolving diversity of populations in Latin America, the increasing presence of mixed families in the Canadian context like Candace and María Fernanda’s evidence new and different Latin@ diasporas. These mixed and transnational latinidades disrupt notions of latexidad limited to the Spanish-speaking countries of Latin America, creating new conceptions that extend to and include other parts of the world.

Finally, gender roles and expectations with respect to the ways in which Latin@s should think and behave also factored into the students’ self-identification as Latin@. As was illustrated in the case of María Fernanda, for instance, to be Latin@ meant to embody a particular role and look as a sexualized and helpless being. Yet for Mariano, being Latin@ was not so clear cut, as he found himself balancing contradicting roles and expectations.

What the data in this chapter demonstrates is that processes of self-identifying as Latin@ are complex and full of contradictions. This raises the question of how do such complicated and messy processes figure into collective acts of community? As we shall see in the chapter that follows, in the midst of such diversity also lie various points of connection that provide the possibilities for conceptualizing and enacting a Latin@ community. In the case of the Proyecto Latin@ YPAR course, this community was a learning collective of youth who sought to engage in a critical inquiry and who encountered both successes and challenges in the process.
Chapter 5

“En familia … una comunidad”:
Community engagement through YPAR

Mariano: [S]haring, sharing thoughts and mindsets with everyone. It was the best time I think.

Manuel: Lunches..yeah…it was the best time together

Mónica: Okay, lunches okay..

Yadira: Yo creo que todo [I think everything].

Germán: Sí, me gustó casi todo pero así ... podemos hablar y no sé, compartir cosas y me gustaba esa parte… [Yes, I liked pretty much everything but … we could talk, and I don’t know, share things. And I liked that part].

Yadira: Así, yo igual…que me más, más gustó mucho fue, fue la verdad el trabajo como en grupos… [Yeah, me too … what I liked the most, the most, was, really was the group work]…

Mónica: ¿Ah, sí? ¿Por qué? (Ah, really? Why?)

Yadira: Porque las peleas, porque fueron las rizas, ... eso fue el [sic] mejor parte de todo. [Because of the fights, because of the laughter, … that was the best part of all].

Excerpt from the Proyecto Latin@ course evaluation, June 2011

Sharing thoughts. Sharing food. Group work. Fights. Laughter. These interactions, which point to times of friendship and community as well as times of conflict, reflect a sample of the students’ thoughts when asked about their most memorable moments in the Proyecto Latin@ YPAR course. This chapter will examine these multiple and sometimes conflictive interactions
between the students and facilitators over the course of the Spring 2011 semester, and will also seek to challenge the romanticized notions of community and community engagement within a YPAR context.

In this chapter then, I will make a two-fold argument. Firstly, I will argue that the students’ identifications with拉丁idad in the context of the Proyecto Latin@ YPAR course facilitated the creation of new relationships and even a sense of kinship, which in turn facilitated a sense of what Yadira described as “family or community.” Yet, as Yadira and her peers pointed out in the opening words of this chapter, the relational processes involved in the class were complex, entailing not only times full of laughter and sharing but also instances of conflict. These words take me to my second argument, in which I assert that the relational processes of community engagement in the course were fluid, comprising not only the continuous creation and recreation of community but also a great amount of (sometimes heated) shared deliberation in the quest towards the democratic project of YPAR (Mohanty, 2003, 2006; Ozer & Douglas, 2013).

**The Contact Zones**

In this chapter, I also find it useful to borrow from Torre’s (2009, 2010) conceptualization of YPAR spaces as “contact zones.” Drawing from the work of Mary Louise Pratt (1992), Torre theorizes contact zones as social spaces in which people meet and interact with each other. Within these interactions, she contends, are multiple and differing positionalities and power asymmetries, which in turn are manifestations of the vestiges of colonialism and other forms of oppression. In contact zones, however, these power asymmetries are not simply accepted without question; contact zones require a more rigorous examination as well as the contestation of power structures and the ways in which they shape lived experiences. In her own
YPAR work with a diverse group of youth in New York City, Torre combines Pratt’s notion of the contact zone with Anzaldúa’s theory of mestizaje. In this conceptualization of the YPAR space, individuals are not only recognized and valued for their knowledge, but also tasked with co-creating new knowledge, which in turn leads to the creation of “new ‘hybridized’ selves – selves with contrasting, conflicting roots, selves from communities, people, now responsible for one another” (Torre, 2010, p. 6). Central to these continuously evolving contact zones are open discussions and action to dissect and attempt to mitigate disagreements – or rather, as Anzaldúa calls them, choques. The interactions within these contact zones, then, are collaborative while considering the individual contributions of each member; they are also processual, complex, and demand continuous dialogue.

Such a conceptualization of YPAR contact zones serves as a useful instrument in theorizing the processes of community engagement in the Proyecto Latin@ course. Embedded in the transnational Latin@-ness of the group was a multitude of positionalities, which yielded different power structures that in turn shaped many of the students’ beliefs and actions. In keeping true to the democratic spirit of YPAR, it was crucial to attain consensus. Indeed, the very process of attaining consensus mandated that the students’ voices be heard so that the group could deliberate and then implement a youth-centred plan of action that considers different perspectives and standpoints. While such a process entailed some very difficult conversations that would have been easier to relegate to the sidelines if at all, it was important to foster community through coming to better understandings of each other and the ways in which “colonizing leaks into our stuff” and how “we are implicated in each other’s lives” (Anzaldúa, 1999, p. 243). I agree with both Anzaldúa (1999) and Torre (2010) that we need to ask how we

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34 I have discussed the theory of mestizaje in Chapter 4 of this present dissertation.
are implicated in each other’s lives and how our relationships shape the outcome of our work. I also ask, however, how those relationships shaped the ways in which the students engaged with each other within the YPAR community. This chapter, then, is an examination of the processes of community engagement within the YPAR contact zone of Proyecto Latin@.

To begin this task, I return to the opening scene of this chapter, in which Yadira and her peers shared their thoughts on what they viewed as the best moments of the course. That conversation occurred on Friday, June 24th, 2011, which marked the date of our penultimate scheduled class meeting. It was a bright and warm summer evening; on this occasion, we were scheduled to meet in a fifth-floor room at OISE rather than in our regular meeting space in the Urban High School library. After walking through the 5th floor hallway and pushing open the massive dusty rose door to enter our meeting space, I found myself in a sunny classroom space resplendent with excited student chatter. Such camaraderie and liveliness had become a common scene among the students, both during and outside of classroom time. While the students expressed their sadness that the course was drawing to a close, they also articulated their excitement about our class dinner at a local Chinese restaurant later that night.

Adding to the students’ excitement was the public presentation at OISE/University of Toronto the following morning. In addition to preparing for their dissemination presentations, the youth had organized many of the details of this public event. This event organization included the drafting and sending out of invitations to over 100 people, including their teachers, school board officials, and their peers. They were excited about the prospects of having their work considered for future educational initiatives involving Latin@ and other racialized youth, and were keen on continuing their relationships with each other and the people that they had encountered throughout the course. As Melisa excitedly shared, this research celebration was one
in which they would publicly articulate, in their own words, their work and recommendations for
ameliorating the socio-educational conditions of Latin@s in Canada (see Guerrero, Gaztambide-Fernández, Rosas, & Guerrero, 2013; Welton, 2011). She described the event as a:

big public presentation of all the work we’ve done in the past 4 months. I love everything
we’ve done in our past Saturdays … [t]o finally see the final product of each of my
classmates’ work is what I look forward to and it brings me great joy and excitement … I
can’t wait!

On this Friday night in particular, the students were tasked with evaluating the course and
providing their suggestions for improvement. In order to provide the students with the
opportunities to engage with each other in more intimate settings and to speak even more freely,
we had designed this feedback session as one that would take place in small focus group
conversations. As adult researchers and co-facilitators, Rubén, Mónica, Elizabeth, and I were
interested in the students’ honest perspectives on their expectations of the course, their
experiences of inclusion and exclusion, and their thoughts on what they had learned and what
they wished they could have learned more about. As Luciana put it, during the course of the
semester “cada persona se podía expresar libremente y expresar sus sentimientos y lo que la
demás gente piensa sobre nosotros los latinos” [each person was able to freely express
her/himself and her/his feelings and what others think about us Latinos]. This activity was no
exception, and as Rubén reminded the youth-researchers, they were free “to say anything.”

Such freedom of expression was fundamental to our work as adult YPAR practitioners;
although the contact zones of the course comprised institutional school and university space, we
sought to co-create a community learning environment that Welton (2011) describes as one in
which youth “could exert a freedom of expression to identify, challenge and speak back to school
policies and individual acts among educators that were reflective of privilege and power and that made Latino youths virtually invisible in their own school settings” (p. 3). As all of the students in this YPAR course attended the same school during the week, they could all speak to the school spaces and the interactions within. Indeed, during one a school mapping activity, the students revealed that their school itself was not only an officially English-speaking institution but also a participant in their experiences as racialized youth. Through this activity, the students shared that while particular ethnoracial groups of students hung out in particular school spaces, there were other areas that were shared, like the library and the weight room. Indeed, the school was a visible character is some of the students’ final group projects; while one group depicted UHS on a painting, another group depicted the school as the prominent background in some photographs as part of a mixed media piece.

35 I also discuss this school mapping activity in Chapter 4 in the section entitled “El español nos une” – Unity through the Spanish language – But in what ways?”
On Saturdays, however, the UHS space became a space in which the students could choose whether to express themselves in Spanish, English, or whatever combination of the two languages. In spite of the diversity of the students with respect to a variety of factors including (but not limited to) nationality, race, academic backgrounds, and interest, they nonetheless self-identified as Latin@ and shared goals and in many cases, experiences. Such an environment provided a forum through which the students could engage in discussions related to their lives as Latin@ students.

This forum in itself, however, also required that the adults help facilitate the students’ freedom of expression. In addition to working with the youth to co-create democratic and dialogic spaces, the facilitation of the students’ to “say anything” was our ability as the adult facilitators to readily “code-switch” between and within Spanish and English (Irizarry, 2012). Although the majority of the students were able to fluently speak in English, they mostly chose to articulate themselves in Spanish, which in turn produced rich data pieces that may not have emerged had they been expressed in English.36

During this hour-long Friday night activity, we circulated around the class, conversing with the students and prompting them to expand on their ideas. I first approached a group of three students: eleventh-graders Luciana, Nicolás, and Daniel. They were playfully arguing about who would answer the first question, which addressed their expectations of the course. Luciana and Daniel shared their pride in both the amount of work that they had accomplished and the friendships that had been created and nurtured in the space of the course centred on their experiences and concerns as Latin@ youth:

36 The varying nuances in language became especially evident in one of our first major class discussions, which focused on the students’ perspectives on the meaning of knowledge. The youth shared their thoughts in Spanish, distinguishing between saber and conocer. I will return to this point later on in this chapter.
Daniel: Pero yo no pensaba que todo que íbamos a lograr y hacer porque había poco tiempo y no sé, estoy sorprendido, estoy no sé cómo, como orgulloso con yo mismo y mis compañeros que hacemos demasiado trabajo en tan poco tiempo. Yo no creía que eso era posible de verdad, pero somos latinos, sí podemos. Sé que podemos. Unidos hacemos la fuerza.

Luciana: Yo, me sentí que mis expectativas era que solo eran hacer y empezar con el proyecto e ir a buscar la información pero era muy diferente ...

Daniel: No nos conocíamos y creo que ...

Nicolás: Fue una gran experiencia para todos.

Daniel: Pero para mí, me cambió porque no hablaba con todos y entonces yo los conocí más. Y compartimos las experiencias que a lo mejor tuvieron y ellos también sentían como latinos con las mismas experiencias como latinos en la escuela.

[Daniel: But I didn’t think that we would do all that we did because there was so little time, and I don’t know, I am surprised. I don’t know how, like proud of myself and my peers in that we did a lot of work in such little time. Really, I didn’t think it was possible, but we are Latin@s, yes we can. I know we can. Together we are stronger.

Luciana: I, I felt that my expectations were only to do and start with the project and look for information. But it was very different …

Daniel: We didn’t know each other and I think that ….

Nicolás: It was a great experience for everyone.

Daniel: But for me, it [the experience] has changed me because I didn’t talk to everyone and then I got to know them more. And we shared our experiences and feelings as Latinos, with similar experiences as Latinos at school].
Meanwhile, twelfth graders Martín and Miguel were talking to Rubén and recounting their perspectives on how the relational aspects of the YPAR course created community spaces of engaged team-building and learning. For Martín, the course “brought us people that didn’t really know each other to get to know each other. At the beginning, there were separate groups. Not everybody talked to each other. Right now everyone knows each other and everybody talks to each other.” Miguel concurs, stating that “[t]hat’s true though. Because before this project a lot of people in this class didn’t really speak to each other. They would see each other and some of them would say hi and some of them wouldn’t say hi. But then this program Proyecto Latino brought a lot of Spanish people together.”

When Rubén asked them what they liked the most about their experiences with the program, Martín compared the project spaces to a home space in which he belonged as a family member. He stated that:

I just felt like I had another home when I started coming to Proyecto Latino you know, I didn’t think of it as homework or like a Proyecto, you know, but it’s like going over to another family member to just talk about like Latinos. They talk about umm, the government, politics, and all of that, right? I just like that, like going into another house to talk about serious topics, you know? But it didn’t feel like schoolwork. … And I felt we really came to like be a familia, you know.

In the above quote, Martín articulated his perspectives on the communal and cross-generational relationships that developed between the students, the facilitators, and the community members who engaged with each other in the space of the Proyecto Latin@ YPAR course. While he acknowledged that the Proyecto Latin@ course constituted a senior social science credit course, he also pointed out that the course content covered “serious topics”
relevant to the lives of Latin@s, which “didn’t feel like school work” but rather like going to a family member’s home. Martín’s likening of the course space to home despite the fact that it comprised educational institutional space was particularly intriguing, for it was suggestive of his feelings of belonging to a second familia of transnational Latin@s. Throughout the weekly convergences in the Proyecto Latin@ home, a new hybrid family was created, one that addressed topics that were relevant to its members, which in turn engaged them in what Yadira termed an “espacio de confianza” [space of trust]. The creation as well as the development of such relationships form the very foundations of the processes of community engagement, which in turn are the focus of this chapter.

**Defining Community**

Prior to continuing on to describe the processes of community engagement in this YPAR study, it is necessary that I first delineate what I mean by “community” and “community engagement.” As I had argued in the previous chapter, self-identification with latinidad constituted a key presence and point of bonding among the students and even within the Proyecto Latin@ study itself. On the one hand, it might seem as though a sense of what Taylor (2008) terms “cultural group affinity” would suffice to define the community created in the YPAR course. Nonetheless, such a narrow definition of community not only obscures the diversities in latinidad, but also romanticizes the very notion of community as a monolithic and simplistic entity that is relatively devoid of conflict (Gutiérrez & Arzubiaga, in press; Young, 2002). As Gutiérrez and Arzubiaga (in press) point out, such romantic conceptions of community “preserve the historical and unequal power relations between [the] dominant and non-dominant” (p. 3).
Indeed, the students themselves complicated such homogeneous notions of what Melisa terms a “Latino family,” pointing out that their Proyecto Latin@ family comprised both a fluid motley of latinidades as well as personalities, identity dimensions like race and gender, warm relationships, and at times, conflicts. Several excerpts from Martín’s final written reflection illustrate the point that the Proyecto Latin@ community was a complicated one that presented both points of frustration and connection with respect to power dynamics. While he reiterated that the students “connected” a great deal over the course of the semester, there were several instances of discomfort and conflict, particularly with respect to debates on gender and gender roles. In reference to one particular conversation in which he referred to provocatively dressed women as “steak,” he indicated that he “was kind of put on the spot because it look [sic] like some people had grudges against the other sex.” He added that despite the fact that there “were a few [students] who try to take over” class discussions, the YPAR community setting of the course made him “feel comfortable to take my stand” and share his perspectives as well. According to him, “there weren’t problems that couldn’t be fix [sic] … We are here and fighting the struggle that youth go throw [sic] in a new country.”

A central tenet of the youth-researchers’ descriptions of their Proyecto Latin@ community is the “complex process of production” that brings with it the multiple levels of participation and layers of “being” among the people involved (Gutiérrez & Arzubiaga, in press, p. 4). But where and how do these encounters occur? How did the “home” that Martín described earlier come to be? While the interactions and relational processes occurring within the Proyecto Latin@ YPAR course are certainly important, the physical spaces within the study transpired

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37 This very contentious debate is also mentioned in the methodology chapter but from the perspective of the adult facilitators, who felt conflicted about the ways in which they should intervene in a conversation that generated a great deal of conflict between some of the students. We adult facilitators also document this conversation in Guerrero, Gaztambide-Fernández, Rosas, & Guerrero (2013).
cannot be ignored. Despite the fact that the students took on roles as researchers and as the adult course co-facilitators’ colleagues, this YPAR initiative was school-based and in a credit course context.

In their numerous commentaries about the *familia* that was created during the course, the students pointed to a variety of complex relational dynamics that involve feelings of kinship, solidarity, and the co-creation of knowledge. The students also described such dynamics in the context of the spaces within which they occurred. With these fluid and multi-faceted conceptions in mind, I define community as a group of people whose connections are the aggregate of their perceived ethnolinguistic ties and their interactions in both physical and virtual spaces. The physical spaces – or rather, the contact zones – in this study comprised several locations, including the UHS school library and room 264, which respectively served as our “classroom” and our “lunchroom.” Although we usually met in person on Saturdays, we also interacted with each other via our course Facebook page and through other means such as telephone conversations and e-mail. Such interactions comprised the virtual community spaces that I have mentioned above.

In addition to the conceptualizations of community as the “family” members with whom they regularly interacted in their course contact zones, the students also considered particular persons from local organizations – particularly those with the mandates to serve Latin@s in Toronto – as a part of their community that existed outside of their school. Indeed, the students partook in many of the decisions about who would come into their YPAR spaces as their guests. The people that the students expressed an interest in inviting were individuals that worked with Latin@s in different capacities like research, art, activism, and in some cases, a combination of capacities. While many of these guests self-identified as Latin@ and provided some useful
resources for the students to consider in their own research, there was one visit that generated a continued relationship with some of the students, particularly Nicolás. For this student, this relationship yielded transformative learning and leadership opportunities outside of the course space that not only changed his outlook on his future career possibilities but also on the ways in which he perceived himself as a person. I will return to these topics of leadership and transformative learning towards the end of this chapter and will engage in a much more detailed discussion of the latter in the chapter that follows.

**Defining Community Engagement**

Closely tied to the relational aspects of community and who is a part of the community is how people engage with it. For Abrahams (1996) and Borrero and Yeh (2011), community engagement is a fluid and interactive set of processes that occur in the interest of a shared vision. Such reciprocal processes incorporate various collective initiatives that include but are not limited to: learning, research, consultation, outreach, mobilization, and implementation. Such an extensive range of activities and levels of participation broaden the scope and complexities associated with the term “community engagement.” While I have previously pointed to factors like identity dimensions and personalities when thinking about community, it is also necessary to keep such concepts in mind when conceptualizing community engagement.

Of course, space and access to resources are also crucial in the consideration of community engagement, with the latter being a key factor in the feasibility of achieving particular goals (Ahmed & Palermo, 2010). As some of the students themselves pointed out in their final reflections, the adult co-facilitators served as a crucial resource on various levels, not only in terms of helping to foment community throughout the course but also in providing the
students with the structure as well as the guidance to conduct their research. For example, Gabriel expressed his sentiment that the facilitators allowed the students to “speak and [to have their voices] always taken into account.” Melisa shared similar perspectives, indicating that she “loved how [the course] formed into a real and serious investigation” and that she “felt comfortable with all [her] classmates and friends [as well as her] 4 magnificent teachers.” As the students’ comments illustrate, then, effective facilitation serves as an integral component for both the relational and informational aspects to YPAR work, which in essence is intended as a communal effort. This issue of facilitation is one to which I will return later on in this chapter.

Whatever the case may be, community engagement is “action oriented and requires high levels of interaction between those creating the conditions for participation and those participating. These conditions need to be continuously adjusted and outcomes are often unpredictable” (Nolas, 2011, p. 138). While the credit context of this study necessitated that the students fulfill specific course content and hours of instruction requirements, I would like to underscore that each step of the research process – from the determination of the students’ research questions to the modes of dissemination at the end of the semester – was catalyzed on the basis of the students’ perceptions on how it should proceed.

Describing community engagement through a 5 tenet model

Because of the processual, cyclical, and highly complex nature of the community engagement in the Proyecto Latin@ course, I find it necessary to layer the notion of contact zone with a 5 tenet model that is an amended version of Miao, Umemoto, Gonda, and Hishimuna’s (2011) model of community engagement. In their work with a youth violence prevention program in Hawaii, Miao and colleagues identified 5 tenets that they deem crucial to the processes of community engagement. They are: 1) a common vision; 2) inclusivity; 3)
collaboration; 4) leadership and capacity building; and, 5) social learning. Through this amended model, I will discuss how the processes of community engagement took place in the spaces of the Proyecto Latin@ YPAR course.

Before outlining this model, I would like to emphasize that while Miao and colleagues delineate collaboration as one of the five tenets, I consider it as an inherent component throughout my entire model. The 5 tenets in my model, then, are: 1) shared goals; 2) varied and equitable opportunities for participation; 3) continuous community and relationship-building; 4) knowledge sharing and co-creation; and, 5) leadership, organizing, and the building of social capital. I expand on each of these five tenets below using specific examples from the planning and implementation phases of the Proyecto Latin@ YPAR course.

**Tenet 1: Shared goals.** As I have previously outlined in this dissertation, a key recommendation put forth by the students in the exploratory phase of Proyecto Latin@ was the opportunity to provide their direct input in the educational initiatives addressing Latin@ youth in Toronto schools. In fact, UHS was one of the schools at which we had conducted the study’s exploratory phase, and a number of those participants did express their interest in continuing to engage in work incorporating their recommendations.

Of course, the recruitment of the students did delineate the credit incentive in addition to the prospects of engaging in community work. The research team was fortunate to have received the assistance of the UHS Guidance staff, who arranged for the display of the information session details on their digital announcement boards. The text, which was displayed in both English and Spanish, read as follows:
HEADLINE: ¡LOS SABADOS NUNCA SERAN LO MISMO!

BODY: ¿Eres latino o latina? ¡Ven a pasártela bien con la amistad y el servicio comunitario! ¡Ven a estudiar nuestra cultura latina en cambio por un crédito!

Ven a comer con nosotros en una de las sesiones de información para saber más.

Cuando: martes 8 de febrero a las 3:30 y miércoles 9 de febrero a las 12

Los estudiantes de todos niveles de español e inglés son bienvenidos.

HEADLINE: SATURDAYS WILL NEVER BE THE SAME!

BODY: LATINO? EXPLORE OUR CULTURE FOR SCHOOL CREDIT - AND FUN, FRIENDSHIP, AND COMMUNITY SERVICE!

COME AND HAVE A SLICE AND SEE WHAT IT'S ALL ABOUT.

Information sessions: Tues Feb 8 3:30pm & Wed Feb 9 noon

Students at all levels of English and/or Spanish are welcome

While these digital messages alone did not cultivate a shared vision, a number of students indicated that the prospects of becoming a member of a group of Latin@ students who engaged in work focusing on their community while earning school credit was both novel and appealing. Additionally, they were aware of the educational challenges facing Latin@s, and were attracted to the opportunities to provide their direct input on initiatives that had the potential to inform future work and policy addressing such issues. While UHS had over 100 students with Latin American backgrounds, it was a large school comprising three buildings and over 2,000 students. As such, the opportunities to interact in a class setting were limited. Some of the youth, including Peruvian-born Juana, commented that the opportunity to meet and work closely with other Latin@ youth on the issues affecting them were key incentives in her enrolment in the program. She noted that:
me interesé más y yo quería saber porque cierto que tantos no terminan la escuela... y quería saber um...quería saber cómo era la que tan grande la comunidad latina aquí y más envolver en eso en las comunidades latinas ... Bueno porque quería saber de ... Yo nunca estado tan cerca a la comunidades latinas,... Nunca estado cerca de las comunidades latinas porque siempre sido mi familia y nadie más, nunca tuve amigas latinas que las dos que [ustedes] conocen y ya otros por allí que era hola y chao jaja, nunca estaba relacionada con la comunidad latina...

[I became more interested, and I wanted to know why, because it is true that many [Latin@s] do not finish school … and I wanted to know um … I wanted to know how big the Latin@ community is here and get more involved in the Latin@ communities …

Well because I wanted to know … I was never close to the Latin@ communities, … I was never close to the Latin@ communities because it was always my family and no one else, I never had Latin@ friends other than the two that you know and then some others that are around that I say hi and bye to, ha ha, I was never involved with the Latin@ community …]

The opportunities to form a Latin@ community within the Proyecto Latin@ YPAR space and collectively engage in work addressing the educational challenges of Latin@ youths provided fertile ground for establishing a set of shared goals. For a number of students, including Germán, this input extended beyond simply providing recommendations to a group of researchers. As he expressed, it was crucial to conduct work that would reach a wide audience that would include not only teachers, but also other youth, researchers, and policy-makers who could help propagate more widespread change:
Mis expectativas de este programa eran muy altas y quería que al final ... hubiera un reporte que se manda al Ministerio de Educación de Ontario ... de esa manera poder cambiar el problema del 40% de estudiantes latinos que no terminan la escuela secundaria.

[My expectations of this program were very high and I wanted a report to be sent to the Ontario Ministry of Education … in that way, the problem regarding the 40% rate of Latino students who do not finish high school could be changed].

For a group to partake in a community endeavour, it is crucial to have a shared goal as well as shared values and a common understanding of an issue or set of issues that require action (Abrahams, 1996; Miao, Umemoto, Gonda, & Hishimuna, 2011). While this initial convergence is foundational in identifying and working towards group endeavours, it is also necessary to provide the opportunities for all to engage in open dialogue. In the Proyecto Latin@ contact zone, these opportunities consisted of joint conversations about power and the sharing of all decision-making processes. Since this contact zone also involved a wide range of personalities, it was also important to establish that participation took on many other forms besides speaking at length about the course topics. To keep true to the notion of an engaged YPAR community, the Proyecto Latin@ contact zone became one enriched with the different and valued contributions of each member, thus creating what Melisa described as a “comfort zone.”

Melisa’s emic theorization of the Proyecto Latin@ space as a “comfort zone” created an imaginary of contact that was not only warm, but also collaborative and centred on the students. This very (re)conceptualization of contact within a school space demonstrates a shift in Melisa’s initial reservations to enrolling in the course because she was born in Canada and primarily
spoke English.\textsuperscript{38} Despite these concerns, she did enroll in the course, through which she
developed not only new relationships, but also a greater understanding of the issues facing
Latin@ youth as well as a commitment to action-oriented change. For her, the end of the course
comprised a source of sadness, because it meant that her Saturdays would no longer encompass
the “comfort” of being in the Proyecto Latin@ YPAR space. During the final group evaluations,
she shared her sadness about the course’s end with Rubén, saying that she was “sad though, but
can we, can’t we all come back, can we?” Later on in the session, when I sat down to join her
group’s conversation, we talked about the upcoming Saturdays after the course:

Melisa: Before I would wake up and ah! There is nothing to do on Saturday.

Cristina: What are you going to do next Saturday? Sleep in, I guess, and rest a little bit
more, right?

Melisa: Aha, another boring day.

Cristina: You saying that Saturdays were always boring? I’m joking. [laughs]

Melisa: No, no! [laughs] … Sometimes school is boring but I looked forward to
Saturdays … like, we are going to make a change … [A]bout the dropout rates,
I kinda think it is unfair … They\textsuperscript{39} point out all the stereotyping and the bad
things and just like wow, … I did not see that … [b]ecause there are so many
hard workers here.

This conversation highlights a variety of factors related to school and the interactions
within. While the humour in part of the excerpt points out Melisa’s comfort in laughing with me,
the serious tone that she developed when challenging the deficit frames of thinking that people
have about Latin@’s points not only to her commitment to changing such perspectives, but also

\textsuperscript{38} Please see Chapter 4 for the discussion about Melisa’s apprehensions to enrolling in the Proyecto Latin@ course.
\textsuperscript{39} Here, Melisa refers to other people who have deficit frames of thinking about Latin@’s.
to her own insider knowledge of what she came to know as a Latin@ youth. Moreover, Melisa’s words and her theorization of the “comfort zone” (re)shaped an institutional space into one that involved a sense of community and the shared goals of action for change in different ways reflecting their backgrounds, knowledge, and comfort levels in engaging with this work.

Tenet 2: Varied and equitable opportunities for participation. Accompanying the students’ shared vision for their work was their concern for the group as a whole and the outcomes of the research that they sought to accomplish (Lai & Hynie, 2010). In order for the students to engage with this work, however, it was crucial that the course be designed and implemented in a manner that reflected their input. The youth input from the exploratory phase of Proyecto Latin@ provided the facilitators with an understanding of the importance that they placed on factors like language usage and funded opportunities, which in turn aided them with the initial design of the bilingual Saturday course. While the facilitators were tasked with the responsibilities of ensuring that the course content fulfilled provincial curriculum guidelines, our commitment to the youth-centred principles of YPAR also inspired us to work with and alongside the students in every step of the research planning and implementation (Tuck, 2008). This organic progression meant that the facilitators’ weekly planning meetings were based on the previous meetings, and of course, in consideration of the various language and academic abilities of the students. Students such as Nicolás expressed their positive perceptions of being an active component of the entire research process, indicating that he considered the course to be “very cool… we had the opportunity to choose the themes and the ways in which we would work with them.”

Again, the credit-based context of this YPAR study signified that the degrees of youth participation varied according to the task at hand. As educators who were deeply committed to
the youth-centred principles of YPAR, we sought as much as we could to share power and
decision-making with the students. Some of the most important decisions made by the group,
including the course marks breakdown, were made in our regular culture circles. While the
students’ course marks breakdown was adopted as the official grading criteria for the course, it
was still up to the “official” course instructor (Mónica) to grade the students’ work, input the
marks, and submit them to the Toronto District School Board. Despite this adult-initiated and
adult-officiated task, the students still played an active role in determining what criteria should
be graded and how it should be graded.

Of course, there were several students, like twelfth graders Susana and Mariano, whose
frequent and vocal participation embodied the kind of participation often cited (and lauded) in
YPAR discourses (Guishard, 2009). As both the video and audio-recording data revealed, these
two outspoken students continuously exuded high levels of confidence, enthusiastically sharing
their insight on a variety of topics and in a variety of contexts, including a teacher development
panel at their school. As I have discussed before, the students enjoyed what Susana terms “a
great deal of freedom” in expressing themselves – whether orally or in writing – in their choice
of Spanish, English, or in a combination of the two languages. This freedom to express
themselves was extended in both class-wide and small group settings, which in turn was intended
to foster more widespread participation from the students, who represented a variety of
personalities, language preferences, and even learning styles.

Despite these varied group arrangements, several questions still remained: What
constituted engaged participation in Proyecto Latin@? Was it merely a matter of speaking out in
class? Or did it entail democratic voting processes when deciding on how to proceed with the
research and in other important class decisions? Did participation manifest itself in the same
manner with every student? Did some of the students take on too much *libertad* and as such coopt that of their peers? Did that process inhibit the engagement of the students were not as vocal? Araceli’s words, which I present below, will provide insight that will help to answer some of these questions.

In contrast to the highly vocal ways in which students like Mariano and Susana articulated themselves, Araceli contributed to the class through her listening. Shy and soft-spoken, she revealed her own perspectives on what participation could look like. For her, participation within one’s own “comfort zones” illustrated that it is a heterogeneous and fluid set of endeavours that can shift according to both one’s personal preferences and the social contexts. In her final reflection, she noted that:

> I felt like in my group I talked the least and kinda just let the others to do the talking but that was because most of the time I didn’t really know what to say or I was nervous to speak to the whole class … but there were days where I was very focus [sic] on what I was doing and just giving the best out of me and given out my ideas and opinions to my group.

Here, Araceli delineated her nervousness at participating in both large and small group contexts. Yet at the same time, she articulated her own kind of participation, in which she contributed her “best” “ideas and opinions” to her peers. While this self-described “shy” student was not among the most vocal in the class, she nonetheless registered her perspectives in different ways and at different times. For instance, Araceli sometimes exercised her right to abstain from making comments, particularly when it came to discussing contentious issues or class decisions. But in other instances involving kinesthetic team-building activities and culture circle conversations addressing personal triumphs and disappointments, she was keener on
engaging with her classmates. When it came to the sharing of responsibility in her research sub-group, she also engaged closely with the tasks at hand, helping her group “finish [their] survey and hand them out … and at the end putting all the data in the computers.” It was Araceli, in fact, who approached me and asked me for feedback on her group’s initial survey draft.

Araceli’s words and actions challenge the notion of youth participation in YPAR as a process in which all consistently participate in linear and vocal process that is always manifested by all students and in every instance. Such homogenized conceptions of participation obscure not only the meanings of participation, but what participation should look like (Nishad, 2011). Participation on Araceli’s terms was contingent on her “comfort zones” and in the context of the task as well as the group setting. With reference to her research sub-group, she indicated that it was “the best … working with our groups.” Like others, she also mentioned that “everyone counts, and at the end, I give good results.” Such assertions illustrate the very notion that the acknowledgement and incorporation of different kinds of student participation in the class promoted higher levels of community engagement.

Araceli’s assertions also point to both the individualistic and collective levels of community engagement. While she indicated that she personally felt most comfortable participating in the larger group as a listener who was present for discussion, she also asserted that it was “the best” to work with her smaller group. Araceli, then, participated in different ways according to the group format and her comfort level; her ability to employ different modes of participation allowed her to engage with - and feel like a valued part of – her class community. The comfort that Araceli developed with her class became evident the following year when she represented her group at a panel at the 2012 meeting of the American Educational Research Association. To attend this presentation, Araceli not only flew to Vancouver, but also practiced
her presentation with her classmates who were representing the other sub-groups. Her presentation was well-received, and she even used some humour to break the seriousness of the statistical analysis that she presented. Such circumstances tell us that when youth feel as though they “count” as colleagues and are not continuously subjected to the hegemonic and hierarchical ideals of participation and power, they feel more engaged with their peers and their work (Cahill, 2007; Cammarota, 2008; deFinney, 2007). I still think about, however, how these instances and different levels of community engagement originate. How are these instances of community engagement nurtured in the process of YPAR? As the next section will illustrate, community engagement in the Proyecto Latin@ contact zone required continuous opportunities to holistically build relationships and to engage in team efforts.

**Tenet 3: Continuous community and relationship-building.** While the YPAR foundation of the Proyecto Latin@ course necessitated organic development, there were two core practices implemented as ways of fostering community with and among the youth: the circle and the class meals. I discuss each of these practices in their own subsections below.

**“When we all got together in a circle”: The Proyecto Latin@ class circles.** “Hello, beautiful people! We are going to begin.” These two lines, which Mónica enthusiastically articulated every week, stand out in my mind every time that I think of the beginning of each Saturday morning at UHS. Accompanying that mental image is that of the circle in which we all gathered when we heard Mónica announce the start of class. This circle, which was enacted from the facilitators’ understandings of Indigenous practices and the Freirean notions of the culture circle, marked the beginning and end of each and every class (Batiste, 2002; Freire, 1970; Souto-Manning, 2010). As YPAR practitioners, the facilitators were also deeply involved in the circles, sitting with the students, and participating in each and every activity that occurred within them.
While as Latin@s we all brought our own diverse relationships to Indigenous histories from different places across the Latin American continent, we also recognized that our contact zone was located on the lands of the Mississauga Anishinaabe and the Haudenosaunee peoples and that we were settlers (or the children of settlers) “who have submitted to the state’s authority, even as we contest[ed] it” (Sehdev, 2011, p. 268).

Our circle gatherings also served as a counter-format to traditional schooling practices; in addition to physically differing from the students in desks and teacher at the front set-up, they also provided many opportunities for the students to engage in generative conversations based on their experiences and knowledge (Ronald & Roskelley, 2001; Freire & Macedo, 1987). These conversations, which ranged from sharing personal achievements and disappointments to collectively deliberating on important decisions like course evaluations and who to invite in their class space, fomented the building of classroom community. Araceli described the circles as “memorable,” stating that:

> When we all got together in a circle and shared ideas and talked about … how everything was going along and discussed if we had any questions … I found that very nice because we got to know each other more.

> Araceli’s words illustrate a multi-faceted consciousness of the circle, one that engenders a deep recognition and care of our collective learning space as a “spiritual and material entity” (Haig-Brown, 2009, p. 4), an entity through which we collectively shared our pasts, our presents, and our relationships to them. This sharing was both a personal and a collective process; while the students had the options to share or not share, they also had their peers and adult facilitators as sources of various types of support, whether it was listening or specific feedback. The

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40 See my discussions in Chapters 2 and 4, in which I discuss the Indigenous roots of Latin@s.
relationships that were built and nurtured through this sharing generated a deep sense of community and kinship, which twelfth grader Yadira described as giving her the feeling that “truly ... we were a family.”

In addition to creating spaces of sharing, trust, and understanding, the circle gatherings also served as the foundation to embodied and interactive activities focused on team-building and problem-solving. In the final evaluation of the course, Luciana and Nicolás told Mónica their perspectives on how the circle activated them to re-connect with their peers and the facilitators, some of whom they have not seen since the last class:

Luciana: No sé, me gusta esos que hacíamos antes de pensar, todo eso así como ...

Nicolás: ¿Lo físico?

Luciana: Ahí, eso más físico y nos divertimos bastante.

Nicolás: Ah para quebrar el hielo.

Luciana: Ya, pero me gustó más el, no sé cómo se llama el que...no sé si fuiste tú o Rubén que lo que inventó. Ese que era de cómo formar algo pero era como un grupo que desenredar ... 

Mónica: Oh yeah, the spider web it’s a good one.

... 

Luciana: Nos ayuda bastante porque o sea no es de que, bueno pero si me siento aparte es un ejercicio que nos ayuda bastante porque en la mañana todos venimos adormitados y todos ... haciendo nos despierta y da ánimos como una energía, ¿no?

[Luciana: … I liked what we did before the thinking, all that like …

Nicolás: The physical [activities]?

Luciana: That, the physical. And we had a lot of fun.
Nicolás: Ah, the icebreakers.

Luciana: Yes, but the one that I liked the most was the, I don’t know what it’s called. I don’t know if it was you or Rubén who made it up. The one in which we had to make something with our bodies in groups and then untangle ourselves …

Mónica: Oh yeah, the spider web it’s a good one.

…

Luciana: It helps us a lot because it is, in other words, it’s not, well, for me it’s an exercise that helps us a lot because we all come sleepy in the morning … doing these, we wake up and feel energized, right?]

The above excerpt illustrates how Luciana interpreted these embodied activities as “physical” and “fun” aids to help energize them first thing every Saturday morning. Indeed, this human spider web activity was just one of the numerous creative ways that Mónica commenced our classes. In conjunction with the personal sharing conversations that also occurred in these morning circles, the youth warmed up and felt energized to continue on to the other pending work of the day.

As I have already noted, the facilitators also participated in all circle activities, which helped to rupture with the traditional power asymmetries that tend to exist between adults and youth, thus fostering a more horizontal power dynamic between us. This purposeful collective action not only helped the students engage with each other and with us as colleagues, but also as a learning community built on mutual trust and understanding (Attree et. al., 2011; Torre, 2009). Such was the context in our class that embraced community across a variety of personalities, learning styles, and positionalities, and the ties that were created within allowed for openness and transparency, even in the face of difficult conversations and disagreements (Anzaldúa, 1990; de
Building community through mealtimes. Our collective sharing was not limited to our scheduled class activities; in fact, our mealtimes together were also central components of the community building that ensued in the Proyecto Latin@ course. Held inside a bright classroom across the hall from our library meeting space, our lunchtimes together served as what Carpenter and colleagues (2008) term an important “social function” (p. 58). While our mealtimes together took place in a traditional classroom space filled with rows of desks and a black chalkboard that sprawled between two walls, it transformed into a lively social space in which we gathered together to share stories over a meal. As Araceli described, lunchtimes became an animated weekly social event in which relationships were cultivated and nurtured in a more holistic manner; she shared that “during lunch … everyone just came together and just talked about their group work and school and how everything was going in life and I found that very nice because we got to know each other more.”

This notion of community building and “familia” was also cited by other students in a focus group conversation held at the end of the course. When addressing the question of inclusion in the course, Juana brought up our mealtimes and stated:

Juana: Y cuando comimos también con todos comíamos como familia … En la hora del lunch.

Linda: Ahh.

Araceli: Sí.

Juana: Como familia, porque todos hablábamos y había esa confianza, verdad? Todos estábamos como familia.

[Juana: And when we ate we would all eat like a family … At lunch time.]
Linda: Ah.
Araceli: Yes.
Juana: Like a family, because we all talked and there was this trust, right? We were all like a family.

This excerpt is just one of the numerous instances in which the students expressed the central function of our class mealtimes in the promotion of their engagement with each other as a community. Indeed, even the UHS Principal and the Superintendent engaged in this meal sharing practice, during which they would talk to the students about different topics, including their course work. These mealtimes together were perhaps the most important components of relationship building, which not only fostered the creation and strengthening of friendships, but also the creation of productive working relationships.

Of course, it is also important to consider the different degrees to which the youth researchers would engage with each other. While new friendships were created and fostered during the course, particularly during mealtimes, there were instances of segregation in which some students rarely ate with some of their peers. This segregation became more evident to us adult facilitators after the course ended, particularly when a conflict ensued between three of the female students while on a trip to an out-of-town conference. These topics of group forming and conflict resolution are areas that are largely absent in the YPAR literature, which tends to overlook the challenges of doing such work.

As I have mentioned in the methodology chapter, the building of relationships and community involved talking through conflict and disagreements. While some relationships became friendships, others became working relationships. Taken as a whole, the relational aspect of the YPAR course helped to build a learning community that not only involved the students
and their community partners, but also the practices of addressing conflict and making important
decisions like determining who would represent the class for an interview at a major radio
station. Each week, the conversations that transpired within the group and with the visitors to the
class would continue, which increased the sense of community as well as the bodies of
knowledge that everyone would engage with, deliberate, and co-create together. This knowledge
sharing and co-creation is the topic of the next tenet of community engagement in the Proyecto
Latin@ YPAR course, which I discuss below.

**Tenet 4: Knowledge sharing and building.** The first few weeks of the YPAR course
were foundational to the students’ sharing of knowledge and experiences as Latin@ youth in
Canada. While it is the case that as facilitators we planned and implemented a variety of
activities focusing on the students’ perspectives as Latin@s, the dialogue that ensued through
these regular exercises was central to an ongoing generative process of knowledge co-
production, which in turn shaped the students’ final research projects.

A key discussion on the topic of knowledge occurred in one of the first weeks of the
course. Because the Proyecto Latin@ contact zone occurred in the context of a credit course, it
was important to establish that while the co-facilitators’ positionalities were related to their
affiliations with the school system and the University, it was not their knowledge that would
drive the research but rather that of the students themselves. In keeping with the principles with
YPAR and the Freirean notion of critical consciousness, it was crucial for the youth to talk
through the question of what constituted knowledge and to arrive at their own conclusions as a
learning community. While the adults facilitated the conversation – and Elizabeth, in fact, who
initiated it – it was important for the youth to recognize together that their perspectives were both
valid and at the heart of their work. Consider the following excerpt from this conversation:
Elizabeth: For you what is knowledge? Can anybody describe?

Miguel: To comprehend.

Rubén: ¿Qué significa eso? What does that mean?

Martín: Significa que [It means that], what we know we know, and with it you’re able to do a lot of things, but you gotta be able to know, learn whatever you can. If you don’t know mac, you’re not going to get anywhere.

Rubén: But does it matter about what? What if, I know a lot about trash?

Martín: It doesn’t matter. The more you know, the more power you have in this world.

Martin’s equating of knowledge to power posited it as a valuable currency that accords people to a particular position in society. When Rubén responded with the question of how two types of knowledge compared with each other, the conversation turned into one that anatomized the topic even further, addressing power differences, language usage, and social context:

Rubén: But is there, is there a difference between knowing a lot about trash versus knowing a lot about nuclear weapons?

Gabriel: I think it gives you, it gives you a different kind of power like, over something else.

Mónica: What do you mean?

Gabriel: Like, you can have power, like, if know something better than another person you can be in charge of that person. Like you know more, so you can say like, what to do. So like, you can know a lot about something and nothing about some other stuff. And, so, you can have power, but power in different ways.

Here, Gabriel presents a Foucauldian argument about knowledge, suggesting that particular bodies of knowledge have the potential to position people in ways that allow them to
exert power and control over others (Rouse, 1994, p. 93). When used in the context of “say[ing] what to do”, “knowledge is the operation of discipline. It delineates an analytical space and in constituting an arena of knowledge, provides the basis for action and intervention – the operation of power” (Townley, 1993, p. 521). For this knowledge to become power, however, it is necessary for the former be recognized as intelligible and authoritive. But does a person’s possession of particular bodies of knowledge necessitate that s/he will actually have more power over others? As Susana’s commentary will point out below, social context and the way in which knowledge is articulated is also very important to consider:

Yo creo que tiene que ver con la manera en que se expresa. Estamos hablando que hay diferentes tipos de poder. Tú puedes saber, por ejemplo, más del campo, pero no es la misma [sic] idioma la de la persona del campo con la que habla la persona que trabaja en una oficina. Pero sin embargo, la persona que vive en el campo puede saber más de lo que está haciendo que la persona que trabaja en la oficina que no sabe ... y que habla con mejores palabras o algo así. Entonces yo creo que tiene nada más que ver con su forma de ser y en donde, la manera, en que se desenvuelva.

[I think that it has to do with the way in which one expresses him or herself. We are saying that there are different types of power. You can know, for example, more about the countryside, but it is not the same language as that of the person who works in an office. But nonetheless, the person who lives in the countryside could know more than the office worker about what s/he is doing, despite the fact that the office worker speaks more eloquently or something like that. So I think that [knowledge] has to do with one’s way of being and the context, the way in which s/he comes across].

In her commentary above, Susana indicated that there are particular “codes of
knowledge [that become meaningful] through their practices, both linguistic and material, through which social actors … achieve social order” (Markkula & Moisander, 2012, p. 108). In the context of the countryside, as she pointed out, a rural person would have more relevant knowledge than an urban person working in an office. Such differentiation of knowledge and the context in which it is communicated thus entails a process of cultural production in which particular discursive formations are deemed more relevant (Foucault, 1980; Mauws, 2000).

Indeed, the usage of the Spanish language in the Proyecto Latin@ YPAR course led the conversation to deconstruct the notion of knowledge even further through an analysis of the terms saber and conocer. While both terms mean “to know” in English, the different parameters of knowledge through a Spanish language dialogue incited a great deal of in-depth commentary as well as confusion about whether and how they were different from each other:

Rubén: Susana, tú dijiste dos palabras, saber y conocimiento. ¿Cuáles son las diferencias entre saber y conocimiento?

Germán: Conocimiento es algo como uno, no, un momento. Uno puede saber, y conocer es como experiencia, pero saber es como, (sighs), saber es como, como es que uno sabe, ya sabe, no puede haber ningún debate por eso. Es como un, un, hecho, yo creo.

Ricardo: No, eh, yo creo que conocimiento es lo que tú ya conoces. Y saber es lo que tú pasas con ese conocimiento.

Mónica: Oh! That’s interesting.

Gabriel: Yo creo que, lo de la inteligencia. El conocimiento y la inteligencia es lo mismo.

Linda: Ay, no.

Rubén: Inteligencia, saber, y conocimiento.

Gabriel: ¿Entonces cuál es la diferencia entre saber y conocimiento?
Susana: No se sabe. ¿Cómo sabemos que la madera es café? De hecho, hay una teoría.

Es como, real, o... creo que uno es más lógico que el otro.

Rubén: ¿Cuál es más lógico?

Susana: La verdad no sé cuál. Como que uno es que viene con la lógica, como que sabes que si tocas eso es caliente, creo que es saber. Saber si uno toca eso que se va a quemar.

Entonces creo que saber. El otro es el que va aprendiendo de la vida. Si veo ... que está lloviendo, me voy a mojar.

Gabriel: No es de la experiencia.

Rubén: ... ¿Cómo saber? Eh, ¿qué otras maneras tiene de saber si algo es caliente, además de tocar?

Luisa: ¿El color?

Yadira: El saber es algo que aprendes, otros te enseñan, tú sabes pero tú conoces porque experimentas.

Rubén: Entonces lo que dijo Germán, lo que escucho un poco. Hay una diferencia entre knowledge, vamos a usar la palabra en inglés para que, knowledge que tiene que ver con la experiencia, y knowledge que tiene que ver con lo que aprenden en libro. Pero lo que no está claro es cual es saber y cual es conocimiento ... ¿Quién sabe?

Luisa: Pero a veces uno no escucha eso, está viendo, o por ejemplo, con las mamás pasan, “no vayan allá porque se queman.” Uno sabe lo que puede pasar pero no es tan fácil. Muchas veces uno tiene que vivirlo, uno tiene que saber lo que pasa, porque no va a creer a nadie más.

Germán: Yo creo que, hay que experimentar para saber.
Jose: No creo que eso es (sic) verdad, porque podemos ver en la tele, que un guey está jugando con un tiburón, ¿tú también lo vas a hacer?

[the students and facilitators laugh]

... 

Miguel: They both are important. ... You need both. If you don’t have both of those, you wouldn’t comprehend as much. I think you need both, to, you know?

[collective uh-huhs and head-nodding in agreement]

....

Ricardo: He llegado a otra conclusión. A diferencia de los demás, voy a decir que saber. Porque todo que han dicho viene de una palabra, saber. Tú sabes que tienes diferentes conocimientos, y los conocimientos que tienes lo tienes por medio de la experiencia. Entonces no todo es tan diferente. Todo viene de un lado pero todo tiene pero tiene distintas ramas.

Rubén: ¿Colectaste esa definición colectiva?

[laughter from the class]

Germán: ¿Conocimiento y experiencia?

Ricardo: No. Saber y conocimiento y experiencia.

Rubén: O sea, el saber se forma a través de las experiencias, y los conocimiento es una forma de saber.

[Rubén: Susana, you said two words, saber [to know] and conocimiento [knowledge].]

What are the differences between to know and knowledge?
Germán: Knowledge is something like how one, no, just a moment. One can know, and knowledge is like experience. But to know, is like, [sighs], to know is like, it’s like one knows, already. There can’t be any debate about it. It’s like a fact, I think.

Ricardo: No, eh, I think that knowledge is what you already know. And to know is what you do with that knowledge.

Mónica: Oh! That’s interesting.

Gabriel: I think that it has to do with intelligence. Knowledge and intelligence are the same.

Linda: Oh, no.

Rubén: Intelligence, to know, and knowledge.

Gabriel: So what is the difference between to know and knowledge?

[chatter]

Susana: It’s not known. How do we know that the wood is brown? As a matter of fact, there’s a theory. It’s like, real, or … I think that one is more logical than the other.

Rubén: Which one is more logical?

Susana: I really don’t know. It’s as if one comes with logic, as if one knows that if s/he touches that it will be hot. I think that it is to know. The other has to do with what one learns in life. If I see … that it is raining, I will get wet.

Gabriel: It’s not from experience.

Rubén: … How is it to know? Uh, in what other ways can we find out that something is hot besides touching it?

Linda: The colour?
Yadira: To know is something that you learn, others teach you. You know but you have knowledge because you experience it.

Rubén: So what Germán is saying, what I am hearing is that there is a difference between knowledge, let’s use the English word so that we, knowledge that has to do with experience, and knowledge that has to do with what is learned from a book. But what is not clear is which is to know and which is knowledge … Who knows?

Luisa: But sometimes one doesn’t listen, s/he is seeing, for example, it happens with mothers who say “Don’t go there because you will get burnt.” One can know what can happen but it is not so simple. Many times one must experience, one must find out what happens because s/he won’t believe anyone.

Germán: I think that you have to experience to know.

Jose: I don’t think that’s true. Because we could be seeing that a guy is playing with a shark on TV. Are you going to do it too?

[the students and facilitators laugh]

…

Miguel: They both are important. … You need both. If you don’t have both of those, you wouldn’t comprehend as much. I think you need both, to, you know?

[collective uh-huhs and head-nodding in agreement]

…. 

Ricardo: I have arrived at a different conclusion. Unlike what everyone else says, I am going to say that it is to know [that is more logical], because what everyone has said comes from one word, to know. You know that you have different knowledges, and the knowledges that you have are derived from experience. So things are not that different
from each other. Everything comes from somewhere but everything has various strands to it.

Rubén: So you compiled that collective definition?

[laughter from the class]

Germán: Knowledge and experience?

Ricardo: No. To know and knowledge and experience.

Rubén: So, in order to know you have to experience, and knowledge is a form of knowing.

In this conversation, the youth engaged in a deliberative process in which they theorized and interrogated the ideas that certain kinds of knowledge were more valid than others. As a matter of fact, they did not even mention formal schooling as a source of knowledge, instead pointing out that the knowledge of the more “eloquent” office workers was not necessarily superior to that of the country people. As the words of students like Susana and Ricardo illustrated, knowledge shapes and is shaped by different experiences and in different contexts. Additionally, knowledge comprises different fields and is applicable to different circumstances, thus also shaping the enactment and comprehension of particular concepts as well as the position of particular subjects. Here, the students illustrated that because there were a multitude of different discourses on the topic of knowledge, there was a discursive struggle that was interesting to take up yet difficult to completely comprehend (Hardy & Phillips, 1999; Markkula & Moisander, 2012).

The fact that this particular topic was predominantly taken up in Spanish also added a dimension to the conversation that likely would not have surfaced had it occurred entirely in English. In this dialogue, Susana made a distinction between saber and conocimiento.
Interestingly, however, she also referred to *saber* in its infinitive verb form and to *conocimiento*, the noun form of *conocer*. While she—and her peers—did not arrive at a definitive differentiation between the two terms, they did recognize that knowledge entailed different realms, including experiential knowledge and learning, intelligence, and logic. In this community process of inquiry and interrogation, nonetheless, the students found that knowledge comprised a broad range of overlapping concepts.

Despite the fact that we did not arrive at a final differentiation between *saber* and *conocer/conocimiento*, two elements became evident from this conversation that pointed to the active community engagement in the Proyecto Latin@ contact zone. Firstly, the students felt comfortable with sharing their opinions and to even interrogate the perspectives that they did not agree with. While this dialogue turned into a serious philosophical one that dealt with the lived realities of people, the humour and laughter that was interspersed within seemed to have encouraged the students to speak at ease within their comfort zones. Secondly, the usage of the Spanish language, which was the dominant tongue of the majority of the youth, increased their engagement as well as their conceptualizations of the very notion of what it meant to know and to possess knowledge. In this group exercise, the students engaged in dialogue to collectively make meaning and better understand the meaning of knowledge. The community engagement that ensued throughout this conversation not only encouraged collegial interaction, but also the expansion of the students’ knowledge and agency as youth-researchers (Habermas, 1984, 1987, cited in Reilen, 2012).

The fact that this conversation occurred in the early stages of the course was also crucial to the creation of a community contact space in which the youth would not only feel comfortable in expressing their perspectives, but also validated as knowledgeable researchers inquiring into
their lived experiences as Latin@s. When I asked Elizabeth about her rationale for initiating this conversation later on, she indicated that she was both curious and concerned about how the students would approach the topic of knowledge. Invoking the Freirean idea that challenged the notion that learners were empty vessels who were filled with the knowledge of their teachers, she spoke at length about how she wanted to know what the students themselves viewed as valid knowledge. Would they reflect on the institutional notions of knowledge gleaned through schooling or would they reflect on experiential learning?

Elizabeth also expressed her opinion that in an endeavour committed to the practice of YPAR, it was important to openly bring up and challenge oppressive conceptualizations and structures and to have the students arrive at their own conclusions. In this instance, it was important to challenge the students to reflect on their own lives and to think critically about how knowledge is taken up in different ways and in different contexts – and the ways in which these nuanced conceptualizations and categorizations, or rather, validation of particular sets of knowledge create different social conditions for different people.

The words of several students, including Mariano, pointed to conversations such as the one above as generative instances of knowledge sharing and co-creation. Mariano referred to these dialogues as “eye opening” learning experiences, stating that:

[T]he first weeks were an amazing eye opening time not only because of the fun we had discriving [sic] ourselves as Latinos, but also because by doing so I learned so much more about where I come from and felt like I was not the only one going through a struggle as an immigrant.

Mariano’s words demonstrate his perspective that collaborative endeavours yield rich opportunities to learn more about the group, its members, and the issues affecting them, which in
turn help cultivate personal and collective growth. The feedback, assessment, and reflexivity that circulate among a group of collaborators generate a wider and more comprehensive base of knowledge (Cammarota & Fine, 2008; Torre, 2009). This more robust body of knowledge, which may engender social, personal, and even cultural levels of knowledge, may provide a group with the impetus to devise plans of action that incorporate methods and skills they may not have previously considered or felt they had the capacity to incorporate (Banks, 1993).

As Mariano pointed out, the class consisted of numerous immigrant students, many of whom were eager to share their challenges in the social and educational contexts. With respect to the adult facilitators, the three females – Mónica, Elizabeth, and I – were born in Canada. This predominant immigration status among the members of our Proyecto Latin@ family, then, meant that the sharing of first-hand immigrant experiences greatly figured into many of our class discussions and activities. For instance, the problem tree and body map activities mentioned in chapter 3 directly incorporated the students’ own experiences and perspectives as Latin@ youth. In our YPAR contact zone, it was important to engage with a democratic process of knowledge co-creation that also reflected the lived experiences of all students, both immigrant and Canadian-born.

The task of including the Canadian-born students, however, was threatened at a critical point in the course – the determination of the class’ overarching research question. In this instance, the task of democratic and inclusive knowledge co-creation became challenging and seemed to stall progress in the students’ work. While the process of generating research themes and theorizing on common concerns embodied a productive means of collectively deliberating on the future direction of the students’ projects, the question of whether or not to include the term “immigrant” in the overarching research question incited a great deal of debate. The
students had already spent three weeks towards the devising of their overall question; I clearly
remember glancing at the clock and noting that the lunch hour was a mere half hour away and
worrying that this impasse over the usage of the term “immigrant” would be carried over to the
next week. As the following excerpt will show, the students became so engrossed with settling
the debate that they engaged in an in-depth dialogue outlining both sides of the issue that went a
great deal past our lunch time, despite my repeated reminders of the time.

Mónica: ¿Puedes leer la pregunta en voz alta?

Gabriel: ¿Cómo influyen las instituciones sociales – los medios de comunicación, la
escuela, el gobierno – sobre la felicidad de los estudiantes latinos inmigrantes? … Yo
pienso que …. [chatter] si usamos la palabra inmigrante, estamos sacando [inaudible] …

Cristina: ¿Entonces quieren quitar la palabra inmigrante? Okay. Levanten la mano.
¿Quién quiere quitar la palabra inmigrante? … Siete. Okay. ¿Quién dice que sí dejamos
la palabra? Once.

…

Nicolás: …Nosotros estamos haciendo este trabajo que somos inmigrantes. Con nuestro
apoyo. Somos inmigrantes.

Cristina: That’s a good point. Susana?

Elizabeth: [joking] Uh oh – that means the three of us are all out. Oh, and Miguel you
too. We are all out. [The students are laughing].

Susana: Yo estoy totalmente de acuerdo con Nicolás. Esto nosotros lo estábamos
discutiendo afuera. Por nuestras experiencias, nos estamos enfocando en las
experiencias de los inmigrantes latinos. De eso nosotros podemos hablar y nos podemos
entender. Nosotros como latinos hablamos de nuestras experiencias y podemos hablar.

Si quitamos la palabra nos vamos a ir en otra dirección ...

Daniel: Pero yo creo que si nos quedamos con “inmigrante”, nos estamos enfocando en solamente un grupo.

Mariano: Yo creo que ... Pero en usando la palabra “inmigrante”, estamos cerrando la puerta a muchas personas, que pueden decir, “o no, naci aquí, no es para mí.” Ellos también son latinos y pasan por los mismos problemas.

Nicolás: ... Todos aquí somos inmigrantes …

Martín: I disagree. Si hacemos eso, does it really matter if you are an immigrant or if you were born here? Because if your parents were Spanish speaking, why should we take out the people who were born here?

[Mónica: Can you read the question out loud?]

Gabriel: How do social institutions – the media, school, and government – impact the happiness of Latin@ immigrant students? … I think that … [chatter] if we use the word immigrant, we are removing [inaudible] …

Cristina: So who wants to remove the word immigrant? Okay. Raise your hand. … Seven. Okay. Who would like to keep the word? Eleven.

…

Nicolás: …We are doing this work as immigrants. With our help. We are immigrants.

Cristina: That’s a good point. Susana?

Elizabeth: [joking] Uh oh – that means the three of us are all out. Oh, and Miguel you too. We are all out. [The students are laughing].
Susana: I completely agree with Nicolás. This is what we were talking about outside. We are focusing on the experiences of Latin@ immigrants because of our experiences. We can talk about and understand that. As Latin@s, we can and do speak about our experiences. If we take out the word we are going to go in another direction …

Daniel: But I think that if we do keep the word “immigrant”, we are going to only focus on one group.

Mariano: I think that … But in using the word “immigrant”, we are closing the door to many people who can say, “oh no, I was born here. This is not for me.” They are also Latin@s and experience the same issues.

Nicolás: … We are all immigrants here …

Martín: I disagree. If we do that [retain the word “immigrant”], does it really matter if you are an immigrant or if you were born here? Because if your parents were Spanish speaking why should we take out the people who were born here?]

This conversation yielded several key themes that pointed to the processes of community engagement in the space of the Proyecto Latin@ YPAR space. The most contentious issue in this pivotal episode was the determination of what it meant to be an immigrant and whether or not the term should be included in the students’ overarching research question. As I have discussed in Chapter 4, immigrant and generational status – that is, whether a student was born in Latin America or in Canada – was a highly debated point for some students when it came to determining whether someone was Latin@ or not. However, it is also worth noting that the students who expressed a strong conviction that Canadian-born students could also be Latin@ were in fact – with the exception of one student who arrived in Canada as a toddler – born in Canada themselves. In this case, 18 out of the 20 students were born in Latin America and were
predominantly Spanish speakers. When the issue was called to a vote, 11 out of the 18 students who were present in class that day voted to include the term “immigrant” into the overarching research question.

Despite this vote, the debate continued. In fact, Susana revealed that she discussed this contentious topic with some of her peers, and declared her opinion that the research should reflect their experiences as Latin@ immigrants. What was particularly intriguing was the fact that Nicolás concurred, stating that “we are all immigrants,” which raised the question of how the students understood the term. Did the term include only those who came to Canada from Latin America? What did Nicolás mean by “we are all immigrants?” Did he mean to also include the second-generation students who were the offspring of Latin@ immigrants? Or did he forget about them despite the fact that Elizabeth joked about the three female facilitators and the Canadian-born students being “out” of the research? This statement was not without controversy, as both Mariano and Martín both spoke up for the inclusion of their Canadian-born peers, citing the term as exclusionary.

Whatever the case may be, the very questions about who was an immigrant and whether or not immigrant status was a requisite to being considered Latin@ in the students’ research demonstrated that the term was highly complex and not necessarily static. Indeed, the fact that the students were very engaged in continuing this dialogue past the start of the lunch hour demonstrated their genuine interest in each other’s perspectives, even though they were different from their own. They trusted their peers to listen to their opinions and provide their feedback. As Reilen (2012) argues, “[d]eliberation is closely related to dialogue but focuses more on decision making through a collective process that could very well be dialogic. In other words, the trust
and mutual understanding that are built through dialogue can serve as a basis for reaching reasoned, informed, and public-spirited decisions of common concern” (p. 8).

In the end, the students decided that they would remove the term and allow their research to develop organically and include discussions on immigration if and when their participants would raise them during the course of their projects. As Gabriel stated in reference to Miguel when the decision was made to remove the term “immigrant” from the question, some Latin@s are the “children of immigrant parents. Because of that, we stay with just Latin@ … All Latin@s are in trouble.” This episode, which initially began with a strong inclination towards maintaining the inclusion of the term “immigrant” in the research question, ended with an informed decision in which students expressed a variety of perspectives. As a collective, they heard different interpretations – or at least, articulations – of the term “immigrant”, and deliberated on the implications of both retaining and removing the term. The students appeared both content and relieved after this dialogic process, having learned not only more about the implications of their final research question but also about what it meant to arrive at a decision through careful deliberation. The video data shows the students smiling as they leave the classroom for what I playfully referred to as our “last 7 minutes left for lunch.” Such patience, commitment, and collegiality on the part of the students are very telling of how the collective processes of knowledge-building contributed to the processes of community engagement in the Proyecto Latin@ YPAR course.

**Tenet 5: Leadership, organizing, and the building of sociocultural capital.** Closely related to the notions of knowledge building as a community are those of leadership, organization, and the building of sociocultural capital. As the students’ words in the above section point out, different people have different types and levels of knowledge that correspond
to their social contexts. But what happens in a transnational Latin@ YPAR community comprising youth with differing ideologies, experiences, and standpoints? What do the sharing and knowledge building in the Proyecto Latin@ course do for the development of the youth’s leadership, organizing, and social capital building capabilities? How do these processes contribute to the students’ community engagement?

According to Yadira and Susana, the constant opportunities to share and learn from various people and in various ways were critical factors in their engagement with the class as a community. The Proyecto Latin@ YPAR course included four co-facilitators, and each of us brought different experiences and expertise to our interactions with the students. Course instructor Mónica, for instance, brought with her a wide repertoire of student-centred teaching strategies gleaned as a teacher in alternative school settings while Rubén, the Principal Investigator and university professor, contributed his expert knowledge on research planning and implementation. Elizabeth, the undergraduate research assistant brought with her several years of experience tutoring youth with literacy challenges. As a graduate project assistant and high school teacher with several years of experience teaching Spanish and the social sciences, I brought with me a combination of researcher and teacher knowledge. In turn, the students who had enrolled in the course brought a wealth of experiences and knowledge reflecting a diverse range and a wealth of experiences and knowledge In our contact zone at UHS and wherever else we met, we created what Miao and colleagues (2011) describe as a mutual “space of exchange” and reciprocity that not only values each individual’s knowledge, but also presents continuous opportunities to increase the group’s capacities in ways that may not have been possible before (p. 128).
Given that the course was structured as a social science course focused on research, the youth were presented with a variety of opportunities. In addition to gleaning valuable research skills, they also deliberated together on who they would invite into their course spaces as their guests. These visitors, who had worked with Latin@s in a variety of capacities, including research, different forms of art, and activism, all contributed resources that the students felt would be useful in helping them develop their research. Taken together, these continuous learning opportunities provided them with increased levels of social capital, which include leadership and organization skills as well as valuable connections with others, both in their class group and in their community outside of the school. Such collaborative endeavours fostered the students’ confidence to engage with other leadership roles that would help advance their shared vision of attaining greater levels of social as well as educational equity for Latin@s in Canada. As we saw in various instances throughout this chapter, this community engagement also entailed directly working with people and organizations outside of the school, which in turn yielded a variety of other opportunities as well as networks for the students (Cammarota, 2009, 2010; Miao, Umemoto, Gonda, & Hishimuna, 2011).

A notable example of how community engagement shapes and is shaped by leadership and organizing involve Melisa, Daniel, Germán, and Sebastián, the four students who organized and facilitated a workshop for their peers at a conference for Latin@ students attending Toronto public high schools. At this conference, which was sanctioned by the school board and organized by its equity office, the above students facilitated two of their favourite activities from the class – the body mapping exercise and the stereotypes label simulation. Through the organization as well as the implementation of this workshop, these students took on greater leadership roles that
allowed them to practice their facilitation and networking skills with Latin@ youth from other schools.

Indeed, all four students noted this workshop experience in their final reflections as one of their most memorable, indicating that they had worked well together in its organization and had learned a great deal in the process. For Germán, participating as a workshop facilitator helped him to meet other students and to see that many of them “felt like [he] did…It also open (sic) [his] mind to think of many parts in the world where change could be accomplished.” Melisa describes her facilitation experience as one of her “best moments in this course,” indicating that it “was a really fun and nice learning experience.” In his final reflection, Daniel expanded on his feedback on the workshop and the Proyecto Latin@ course overall as experiences that “abrió puertas” [opened doors] for him through the opportunities to “conocer a más gente” [meet more people] and to “aprend[er] sobre la comunidad latina en Toronto” [learn about the Latin@ community in Toronto]. The pride and ownership that these youth took in their work as they shared it with others emphasizes not only their leadership and organizing, but also an increase in their socio-cultural capital (Cammarota, 2009). Like Daniel stressed, attaining connections with others serve as bridges to other opportunities and advantages that may not have been possible before (Charmaraman, 2013).

The creation of new connections and the bridging to expanded opportunities were especially meaningful to Nicolás and Luciana. Through one of the course’s guest speakers, these two students learned about media production at a local radio station, which in turn led them to the opportunity to host their own weekly youth-led radio show. During the small group conversations at the end of the semester, Nicolás, Daniel, and Luciana reflected on the new opportunities that they attained through their new-found connections with the local radio station:
Nicolás: Y sí es algo importante para mí.

Cristina: Aja. Es algo que querías, ¿no?

Nicolás: Sí, si allá es algo que me conectó con algo me gusta hacer ... en poco tiempo me abrieron muchas puertas ... y el pago es muy, muy bueno.

Daniel: Yo también creo eso como que el proyecto latino que algo como serio, alguien que sea parte del proyecto latino también era serio.

Cristina: Wow, so people are hearing about it.

Nicolás and Daniel (in unison): Sí.

Daniel: Me da gusto ser parte de esto.

Luciana: Yo sentí como alguien muy importante. También cuando la gente pues, le conoce a uno y todo, y medio de todo me miraban en el periódico pues de la escuela me dieron “Ah la que salió.” También eh, es experiencias de que si luego de un proyecto ... se va abrir otras puertas, hacer otras cosas. Como a mí no me daba la atención lo de la radio pero yo una vez yo llego allí es muy interesante y es muy, ehh, uno disfruta el tiempo haciéndolo.

[Nicolás: And yes, it is something important to me.

Cristina: Aha. It’s something that you wanted, right?

Nicolás: Yes, yes there is something that connected me with something that I like to do ... many doors have opened for me in a short time ... and the pay is very, very good.

Daniel: I also think that something like Proyecto Latino is something serious, so someone from Proyecto Latino was also serious.

Cristina: Wow, so people are hearing about it.

Nicolás and Daniel (in unison): Yes.
Daniel: I am happy to be part of this.

Luciana: I felt like an important person. Also when people, well, they know you and all, everyone was looking at the newspaper, and at school they would tell me, “Ah, you’re the one [whose photo] came out.” Additionally, eh, it’s the experiences that from a project, … many doors will open to do other things. Like for me, I wasn’t into radio but once I go there it’s very interesting and it’s very, eh, one really enjoys doing it.

In the above conversation excerpt, the three youth articulated how their involvement with the Proyecto Latin@ YPAR work equipped them with multiple resources in addition to the course content, which included both research methods and meeting other members of Toronto’s Latin@ community that were situated outside of the school and in other parts of the city. As Daniel stated, association with a “serious” endeavour such as Proyecto Latin@ afforded him a “serious” status outside the course as well, which Luciana described as making her feel “important.” Such sentiments regarding their newfound social capital reflect what Portes (1998) describes as the greater facility to “secure benefits by virtue of membership in social networks or other social structures” (p. 6). As Proyecto Latin@ youth-researchers, both Daniel and Luciana enjoyed expanded opportunities that open “many doors … to do other things”, even “things” that they previously had not considered. While Luciana admitted to not being “into” radio at the outset, her exposure to radio show facilitation at a local radio station provided her with both the experience and the opportunities to partake in a new activity that she grew to enjoy.

For Nicolás, gaining entry into the radio show business yielded multiple sociocultural and economic advantages that were salutary to both his present and future objectives. As an aspiring

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41Here, Luciana refers to a Toronto newspaper article that covered Proyecto Latin@ and included a photograph of her and Nicolás with Rubén. For further discussion of this article, please see Guerrero, Gaztambide-Fernández, Rosas & Guerrero (2013).
musician, the knowledge that Nicolás gleaned as the host of a weekly youth-led radio show provided him with further opportunities to build his learning and social connections. As we shall see in the following chapter, this learning and social networking also led to significant change in the ways in which Nicolás perceived and carried himself as a youth media figure and researcher. In a recent Facebook conversation, he indicated that his music addresses social justice issues and the various kinds of love, including romantic and familial love. He has also indicated that he works in participatory settings with youth from different backgrounds who are interested in similar issues, and has also included research techniques such as interviews in his line of work. These youth-led community endeavours are not only indicative of Nicolás’ expansion of his personal expression and confidence, but also to changed frames of reference and action – on both individual and collective grounds – which in turn constitute what Mezirow (1997, 2000) terms transformative learning. This concept of individual and collective learning and change is the topic of the next chapter.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have drawn upon the notion of the contact zone to describe the complex and sometimes uneasy spaces within which the youth and adult researchers interacted. These spaces were the spaces within which the Proyecto Latin@ YPAR class community was formed, developed, and at times, re-developed. While the students often referred to the class as a family, they also described this family as one that had both its successes and challenges, which in turn challenged the often romanticized conceptualizations of community (and family) that are often cited in the academic literature (Gutiérrez & Arzubiaga, in press). The meaning of community was also extended from the classroom context to also include not only Latin@ people outside of
UHS and its vicinity, but also people from local organizations that served the Latin@ community in Toronto.

To describe the interactive processes between the student-researchers, the adult facilitators, and other people within the Proyecto Latin@ contact zone, I drew upon Miao, Umemoto, Gonda, and Hishimuna’s (2011) work to create a 5 tenet model. Through this 5 tenet model, I illustrated how the students’ self-identification as Latin@ (as well as their identification of others as Latin@) created a fluid process of creating and re-creating community, which in turn yielded a great deal of collective dialogue and learning. These processes of community engagement in turn created the spaces as well as the opportunities for the student-researchers to individually and collectively learn in transformative ways.
Chapter 6

“Yo creo que cambió mi vida totalmente”:
Developing and embodying transformative learning through YPAR

Yo pienso que yo estaba haciendo antes que que que, el curso te hacía más parte de tu cultura o sea que realmente acá lo quería ser una realidad querías ayudar. Yo pienso que sí que totalmente ayuda conocerte y otros, y vas a ver que muchos están en su situación. Yo pienso que o sea de parte de todo se aprendió de pronto a el nivel educativo también como una persona. Yo creo que cambió mi vida totalmente.

I think that what I was doing before that, that, that, the course helped one become more a part of her culture. In other words, here one really wanted to make it a reality, to help. I think that, in other words, we learned about the education system but also about ourselves as persons. I think that it completely changed my life.

Yadira, June 2011

Yadira’s words above describe the Proyecto Latin@ course in ways that point to its multidimensional dimensions – dimensions that not only engaged her in conversations about latinidad, but also in collective learning endeavours related to her community. In addition to emphasizing feelings of belonging to what she considered her culture, Yadira also highlighted how such affinity compelled her desire to engage with work aimed at ameliorating the challenges facing them and their community. Embedded in this quest for action were the processes of learning, which Yadira detailed as encompassing topics (inter)related to both the structural and personal domains in her life as a Latin@ youth. For her, this communal process of learning was life-changing.

Yadira’s words also elicited several questions about learning and the “complete” change that it can evoke. What makes this learning and change transformative? How do the processes of identification and community engagement shape transformative learning in Latin@ youths, particularly in the context of YPAR? How does transformative learning impact not only the ways
in which Latin@ youth view themselves and the world around them, but also the ways in which they take up these new perspectives?

In her comparative comment about her cultural perspectives and feelings of belonging before and after the Proyecto Latin@ YPAR course, Yadira also brought up the very important concept of looking back in time. Of course, I must note that the facilitators planned and implemented a set of activities in which the students were tasked with reflecting upon their experiences as well as their recommendations for the Proyecto Latin@ YPAR course. Indeed, in our research proposal we indicated that the course was being initiated at the recommendation of the students who had participated in the exploratory phase of the study. As we wrote in the Ethics Review Board protocol that we submitted to the University and the Board, we wanted to engage the students with the opportunities to embark on research and activist endeavours that were relevant to their lived experiences as Latin@ youth. Given the participatory and organic nature of the course, the adult facilitators planned the course activities in consideration of the occurrences and student input from the previous class. We sought to facilitate an engaging and thought-provoking course in which the students were the co-designers.

While our continued consultations with the students and the ways in which they participated in the class helped us gauge their learning and perhaps level of interest over the course of the semester, it was not until I had analyzed the data that I came to the realization that many of the youth considered their learning as transformative. Despite the numerous instances in which the students used terms like “eye-opening” and “change,” I wondered about the connotation of such terminology. What, I wondered, was the kind of change that was propagated through the learning in the Proyecto Latin@ YPAR course? After all, I thought to myself, I could change the ways in which I solve and understand a math problem. While this new and changed
understanding of doing math might provide me with an increased level of confidence with the subject, I might still forget the rationale and how-tos of the math problem, and the learning and change would no longer be sustained. And even if such learning was sustained, it does not necessarily mean that it was transformative (Mezirow, 1997).

What then, differentiates the students’ assertions of learning and change from other instances? Was their learning transformative? Or would they “forget” everything that they had learned and how they learned the course concepts once the semester was over? But after working with several of the students in a variety of dissemination events and keeping in touch with them over the past two years, my worries have been assuaged to a certain degree. While I certainly cannot assert that all the student-researchers would identify their experiences with the course as transformative, the actions and words of some of them do illustrate the embodiment of transformative learning as a result of the Proyecto Latin@ YPAR course. This chapter is dedicated to these vivid illustrations, which include both the promising and tense moments.

In this chapter, I examine the transnational and cross-generational relationships as well as the community processes that transpired within the YPAR contact zones of the Proyecto Latin@ course. With this examination, I illustrate that such processes prompted what Chmil, Spreen, and Swat (2012) term “pathways for transformative learning” (p. 166). Encompassing both individual and collective processes, transformative learning takes on “imaginative, experiential, cognitive, and affective dimensions of learning” (Brigham, 2011, p. 45). Through this discussion, this chapter argues that the relationships fostered within the Proyecto Latin@ YPAR contact zones created a dialogic and generative forum for transnational youth-centred projects of participatory learning, reflection, and action (De Lissovoy, 2010; Sánchez, 2009). In turn, these collective and individual endeavours – which centred on examinations of how oppressive
colonial power structures impacted the students’ lives – became a transformative learning process in which they began to see and live in their “world through ‘different eyes’” (Cahill, Moore, & Threats, 2008, p. 90). The changes in belief systems and actions as expressed and demonstrated by the students, then, illustrate how the intermeshing processes of critical reflection and dialogue – when fostered in authentic and communal contexts – can effectuate transformative learning (Mezirow, 2000; Sharma, 2013; Taylor, 2011). In turn, this transformative learning provides new and fruitful ground for taking new understandings of oneself and the world into meaningful action that extends beyond the contexts of the school.

**Youth Research in Action: “Proyecto Latin@” Goes to Ohio**

When I reflect on the process of transformative learning in Proyecto Latin@, the first episode that comes to mind is one that occurred in October 2011. The Proyecto Latin@ YPAR course had concluded the previous June and we were a few months into the dissemination stage. This dissemination stage, however, differed from that involving Proyecto Latin@’s exploratory phase because of the students’ participation in presenting the findings. In fact, this conference would mark the students’ second public presentation, which was scheduled to take place at the 12th Annual Curriculum and Pedagogy Conference in Ohio. As the culminating activity for the course, the students organized and presented their research in a public event held at the OISE/University of Toronto library. In front of an audience of over 100 people, including school board officials, teachers, and parents, the youth-researchers shared the findings of the four sub-studies addressing the happiness and levels of satisfaction among Latin@s in Canada. In a variety of ways throughout this dissemination process, the students also elucidated their recommendations for future initiatives for Latin@ youth, which in turn demonstrated not only
their leadership capacities but also their commitment to the social and educational justice premises of their work.

A few days after the course ended (and at the beginning of the summer holiday!), we prepared and submitted a proposal for a youth panel presentation at the 12th Annual Curriculum and Pedagogy Conference in Ohio. Over the summer, the students and adult researchers kept in touch via e-mail and the project’s Facebook page. Much to the delight of the students, the proposal was accepted, and we agreed to meet at the start of the 2011-2012 school year to begin planning for the October trip and to prepare the presentations.\(^{42}\) We were most fortunate to have the full support of the Principal of UHS, who not only helped us with the necessary paperwork for what would be an official out-of-country school excursion, but also with the funds to cover the students’ travel expenses.

The students presented their work on a cold and rainy October afternoon. Earlier that morning, the students met with us – the UHS teacher who accompanied us, Rubén and myself – to test the audiovisual equipment and practice their scripts. Some of the students were very nervous about presenting at their first academic conference, and they worked together to rehearse their presentations and offer suggestions on various aspects ranging from voice pitch to body positioning.

Once again, the students presented an engaging panel of presentations about the research that they had conducted on the Latin@ community in Toronto. If they were nervous, they certainly did not show it. As I sat in the audience during the students’ panel session, I reflected on the direction and life that Proyecto Latin@ had taken since its beginnings almost

\(^{42}\) Out of the 18 students that completed the course, only 6 were able to travel to the conference. While some of the students had scheduling conflicts because they were now attending post-secondary school, other students were unable to obtain the necessary travel documents by the travel date.
four years earlier. I thought about the cool and sunny morning in the Fall of 2008 when I accompanied Rubén to a meeting at the TDSB head office to discuss and plan the project’s exploratory phase. I thought about the Latin@ students who shared their experiences and perspectives a few months later for that first phase, which included their recommendations for change in their schools.

I also thought about how those recommendations became the catalyst for Proyecto Latin@’s YPAR phase, which was implemented in the Winter 2011 semester. I thought about the vast amount of discussion and collaborative research covering the issues that were important to the students. I also thought about the warm and collegial relationships that had developed between the students and the adult co-facilitators. The contradictions and challenges that accompanied the balancing act between honouring the underlying principles of YPAR with the requirements for carrying out the project as a credit course also came to my mind. And, I thought back to the hours before this conference presentation in Ohio and remembered how one of the students, Melisa, was terrified of presenting at her first academic conference. As we went over her PowerPoint slides together, she asked if I would go up and present with her. With reference to her public presentation a few months before, I answered, “Trust me. You presented before and were great! You won’t need me. You will be amazing!”

When the time came for Melisa to present, we looked at each other and started walking towards the front. Without saying a word, I quickly sat down in an aisle seat towards the middle of the room, leaving Melisa to continue walking to the front on her own. After all, I had told her that she would do an “amazing” job on her own. From the moment that Melisa commenced her presentation to the moment at which she ended with an exuberant open-armed gesture pointed at an image of her school, she did not reveal any hint of trepidation or self-doubt. In fact, her
enthusiastic voice and confident body language conveyed a high level of confidence and obscured any hint of the nervous and shy girl that I had known during our Proyecto Latin@ work together. I smiled and felt proud of Melisa’s witty presentation, and soon found myself thinking about the contrast between her present and past demeanour. As she was beaming at the applause from the audience at the end of her presentation, I gave her a thumbs up and smiled at her. Afterwards, I went up to her and said, “See! You didn’t need me at all!”

I also reflected on her comments in the final course evaluation that she had written a few months before, which outlined not only her anxieties about presenting in front of large audiences with her “English accent”, but also her desire to overcome these apprehensions so that she could further contribute to the collective work of the class:

Challenges I faced was when I had to talk in front of people. I am very shy and only speak castellaño [sic] at home with my parents. So I know I stutter and have an English accent but what brings out my courage and strength is thinking about … my classmates … I will try to be less shy to be able to contribute more to my work and classmates!

In her written evaluation, Melisa also cited the relational aspects of the course and the ways in which they created what she dubbed a “comfort zone.” The composition of this “comfort zone”, which comprised a “family of Latinos [sic] students”, was perceived as a “big difference from our Canadian education system.” In turn, these familial dynamics ignited an inner desire to “try to be less shy” and to more openly express her perspectives in front of others. Melisa’s conference presentation was certainly a testament of her transformative learning. Through the collegial and dialogic relationships that were created and nurtured over the course of the semester, Melisa learned more about herself as a Latin@ youth in Canada and the ways in which she can engage with the research process to further explore her community. In the process of
meeting “people [she] didn’t know before” and becoming more “comfortable with all [her]
classmates and friends”, Melisa deconstructed and then re/constructed her own sense of self as
well as her assumptions about her abilities. She had become a more confident and
knowledgeable youth researcher in her own right.

Melisa’s story of transformation, however, did not end with the Ohio presentation on
that rainy morning in October 2011. Indeed, her future activities and accomplishments
manifested her continuing development as a confident and reflective young woman committed to
educational change and collegiality. At a follow-up meeting in January 2012 with the UHS
Principal and the teacher who co-chaperoned the conference excursion, Mónica, Rubén, and I
were delighted to find out that Melisa had been engaging in leadership initiatives within her
school community that addressed her interests in the field of architecture as well as her desire for
educational change.

As I write this chapter almost two years after the Ohio conference, Melisa has
continued to enact and embody the transformative learning stemming from her experiences with
Proyecto Latin@. During this time, Melisa graduated from UHS and enrolled in an Architectural
Technology program at one of the city’s colleges. In a May 2013 conversation on Facebook,
Melisa wrote that:

From Proyecto Latino I learned to be more confident with presentations and my
background. I learned to be more interactive with people and my teachers. It was a great
learning experience. I wish I could have done it again. The group work we did has been
helpful since in my program we almost always work in groups and in the end present our
work … the time and discipline we learned to have from Proyecto Latino has given me
much being it with my work.
In consideration of all the data as well as my recollections with respect to Melisa, several factors shaping her pathways to transformative learning become evident. The social and academic nature of the YPAR course – which was centred on the Latin@ youths themselves – provided Melisa with a relevant and engaging experience that led her to see as well as understand herself in new and different ways (Price-Mitchell, 2010; Sharma, 2013). Through the combination of the collegial bonds that were created and the social capital that ensued through the interactions within the Proyecto Latin@ contact zone, Melisa developed an inner motivation to “try to be less shy” in her work on a “real and serious investigation based on our Latino community.” True to her words, Melisa did indeed work through her trepidation regarding her language skills and presentation delivery to become a more confident public speaker. Despite her initial reservations about presenting in certain instances, her agentic action for change reflected her genuine motivation “from within to direct attention and effort toward a challenging goal” (Larson, 2000, p. 170).

Through Melisa’s ongoing story of her “successive transformations” we can see that she has developed and embodied a new conceptualization of her abilities to confidently interact and share her work with others in a variety of contexts (Mezirow, 1978, p. 104). Such strategizing and implementation of action have provided her with the socio-cultural and academic capital to actively pursue her post-secondary and other career-related aspirations (Cammarota, 2008).

Indeed, a key part of these processes was the critical in-class dialogue that not only took up what it meant to be Latin@ in the context of Toronto, but also in the shifting contexts of the students’ own hybrid lives. These critical and ongoing components to the course not only created the interpersonal relationships that I have discussed at the start of this chapter, but also each students’ own changed taking up of how latinidad is taken up within and among people. As I
have argued at the start of this chapter, the interpersonal relationships that were created in the Proyecto Latin@ YPAR contact zone created a youth-centred learning community dedicated to the transnational Latin@ experiences of the students themselves. The development of such community bonds in conjunction with the development of new socio-cultural and academic capital led the students to see themselves and the world around them in different ways; such cognitive shifts are illustrative of transformative learning (Sharma, 2013). This process, however, can be uneasy and tense at times, and does not occur in the same ways and to the same degrees in every individual.

In this chapter so far, I have named transformative learning and have provided an example to illustrate its manifestation. Before continuing on with this chapter on transformative learning, nonetheless, I find it essential to first engage in a brief discussion that both defines the term and outlines its key characteristics. I will begin this discussion by drawing upon transformative learning theory as put forth by scholars such as Mezirow (1978, 1994, 2000), whose work with adult females re-entering school provides the context for better understanding how particular learning experiences change the ways in which people view themselves as well as the world around them. After this discussion, I will extend Mezirow’s theory to incorporate the students’ own manifestations of how they applied their learning to action – both within and outside the course – that evidenced their changed perspectives of themselves and their roles in their social contexts.

**Transformative Learning**

Mezirow (1981, 1994, 2000) introduces the notion of transformative learning as a process in which individuals attain a particular combination of social capital, agency, and change. While
transformative learning occur in different ways for different people, a fundamental component that spans across this process is the development as well as the adoption of new frames of reference, which he defines as “structures of assumptions through which we understand our experiences … [and which encompass] cognitive, conative, and emotional components” (p. 5). Mezirow outlines the processes of transformative learning through an eleven step model. These steps are:

1. A disorienting dilemma
2. Self-examination with feelings of fear, anger, guilt, or shame
3. A critical assessment of assumptions
4. Recognition that one’s discontent and the processes of transformation are shared
5. Exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and action
6. Planning a course of action
7. Acquiring knowledge and skills for implementing one’s plan
8. Provisional trying on of new roles
9. Renegotiating relationships and negotiating new relationships
10. Building competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships
11. A re-integration into one’s life on the basis of conditions dictated by one’s new perspectives

While the steps involved in the processes of transformative learning occur in different ways and even in different sequences among different people, there are three key tenets that are emphasized throughout the model. These three tenets are: 1) critical reflection and dialogue; 2) experiential learning and action, and 3) transformation. At the heart of this transformative learning is perspective transformation, which Mezirow (1981) defines as a re/understanding of
the world that entails new motivations driven by a heightened sense of agency as well as personal and social responsibility. “Rather than a simple transfer of identification to a new reference group, a new set of criteria come to govern one’s relationships and to represent conditions governing commitments as well” (Mezirow, 1981, p. 9). To come to these new frames of reference, however, it is necessary to engage in critical reflection and exploration that “not only involves the nature and consequence of one’s actions but also includes the related circumstances of one’s actions” (Kitchenham, 2008, p. 114). Through such processes of meaningful understanding and action, one becomes equipped with the knowledge and the tools to take ownership of her/his own agency and to activate new social roles aimed at producing better outcomes (Mezirow, 2000).

There is some academic literature that critiques Mezirow’s transformative learning model as one that “is presented as having a clear start and a clear finish” (Newman, 2012, p. 43). While Cranton and Kazl (2012) also perceive Mezirow’s model as “a fairly narrow view of process” (p. 394) they also point out that there is also a great deal of scholarly literature that theorizes the continuous learning and change that occurs after the reintegration stage that Mezirow mentions as the eleventh stage of his model. Here, I would like to add to Cranton and Kazl’s points and assert that transformative learning is a process that occurs at both the individual and collective levels. While the student-researchers described their own individual learning in their final reflections, they also described how much of their learning came from the collective activities and the ways in which these activities were scaffolded as the group dynamics and the course developed. Moreover, an examination of these final reflections also reveals an overarching theme of transformative learning among the group that became manifest through their actions, particularly after the course had ended.
In the section that follows, I will discuss the students’ descriptions of their transformative learning through a discussion that will be formatted through the three key tenets that I have mentioned above: 1) critical reflection and dialogue; 2) experiential learning and action; and 3) transformation. As the data in this chapter will demonstrate, this transformation encompasses not only the cognitive processes of perceiving the world and oneself in a different way, but also the actions that are taken to evidence these new perceptions. In this case, the students’ actions comprised both their course-related work and their engagement with their social contexts as young leaders who were committed to change beyond the parameters of the course.

1. Critical reflection and dialogue

Critical reflection and dialogue comprised central components of the Proyecto Latin@ YPAR phase. Initiated and practiced on a continuous basis from the very beginning of the course, these two interrelated and interdependent processes provided the youth with the space to share their own lived experiences and to critically think about the ways in which these experiences connected with those of their peers. In turn, these experiential connections foster “relational and trustful communication, often at times ‘highly personal and self-disclosing’” (Carter, 2002, p. 82, cited in Mezirow & Taylor, 2011, p. 9).

The adult facilitators’ commitment to the growth of trustful relationships was evidenced from the very inception of their work with the students. To begin the process, Mónica initiated a name game in the first class so that each person, including the facilitators, could introduce themselves using their first name and an adjective that began with that same letter. For example, I introduced myself as “Clever Cristina.” In addition to this self-introduction, however, each individual was required to repeat the names and adjectives of everyone else who had introduced her or himself already. While this activity incited a great deal of laughter among the students, it
also became a source of discomfort since the action of forgetting names and descriptors would be a process that would occur in front of everyone. I became very uncomfortable during this activity, however, for a different reason.

In this instance, I became very unsettled when it was my turn to repeat a student’s self-introduction as “Sexy Student.” Despite the fact that I was a proponent of participatory education and the shifting of the hierarchical structures, my positionality as a teacher – and the Ontario College of Teachers’ Ethical Standards protocol – led me to refuse to repeat the student’s name with the descriptor. It was an incredibly tense moment for me, and I did think about it for a minute. In the end, however, I decided that my ethical stance on referring to a student as “sexy” – despite the fact that I would merely be repeating the adjective – superseded the game’s premise of creating trustful relationships. For me, calling a student “sexy” violated what I believed constituted relationships of respect. I still do cringe at the very thought of this episode and would still refuse to refer to any student as “sexy.” On the other hand, I do acknowledge that participatory pedagogy like YPAR necessitates the rethinking as well as the reshuffling of hierarchical norms and practices. This is a contradiction with which I continue to grapple.

Indeed, the students themselves experienced similar discomfort when we asked them to refer to the adult facilitators by their first names rather than with formal titles like “Professor” for Rubén or “Miss” for Mónica, Elizabeth, and me. It was especially difficult for Martín, who repeatedly insisted that his respect for us mandated his usage of formal titles. Although Elizabeth and I encouraged Martín to call us by our first names, he nonetheless continued to hesitate to do so, which in turn illustrated the ingrained nature of hierarchical structures and imaginaries that position the adult teachers over their students.
Similar tensions related to teacher-student relationships were also expressed by Susana, who was openly skeptical about the participatory practices of the course. For her, student input in decision-making related to the course was an alien concept, especially at the start of the semester. She indicated that:

*Ah así era como también al principio. Como algo raro y después hacer decisiones como como queremos ser calificados y qué queremos hacer y todo eso. Esto estuvo bien raro. Nunca tuve la oportunidad como elegir como ser evaluada.*

[Ah, it was like that at the start too. Like something strange and then making decisions like how do we want to be graded and what do we want to do and all that. That was really weird. I never had the opportunity to decide how to be graded.]

Gabriel, on the other hand, countered with the perspective that breaking with traditional educational practices and engaging in critical youth-centred pedagogies were useful in helping the class develop a sense of collective responsibility. For him, it was refreshing that “the class was more free, and everyone could give their opinion and all that. Like shape it. Classes should be like that. To me, it is more interesting [to be a part of] what was happening. Because after we are sitting and they are dictating and we are taking notes so that we can study for an exam. But I don’t pay attention [to that].” Here, Gabriel points to a reconceptualization of education as a participatory endeavour that shapes curriculum and student engagement.

The facilitators’ consideration and follow-up of the students’ input, particularly during the first few weeks of the course, were critical in creating the trusting environment that would create the foundation for transformative learning. This trusting environment, however, did not come without its tense moments, particularly at the beginning of the course. These tense moments were especially evident for Rubén, whose positionality as an experienced researcher
and professor led him to be ready to immediately begin data collection. In keeping with the
dialogic nature of YPAR and the research team’s mandate of involving the students in the
course’s decisions, however, he consulted with them first before audio- and videotaping the
classes. As the students expressed concern over how the recording might infringe on their ability
to freely speak their minds, Rubén refrained from recording them during the first class. By the
second class, however, the students decided that they did want to document their work and as
such helped each other learn how to use the equipment as well as videotape the class discussions
that they felt should be recorded.

Indeed, the activities that were carried out and documented during the first few weeks of
the course were instrumental to the continuous personal sharing, which in turn helped shape the
students’ learning and research. In the problem tree activity in the second week, for instance, the
students shared some very personal details about their experiences as Latin@s, particularly with
respect to their immigration and settlement experiences. Consider the following excerpt from
Susana’s presentation of her group’s problem tree:

Nosotros identificamos tres problemas que son [la falta de] ingresos económicos, la
discriminación, y el idioma. Y eso lo basamos en unas experiencias que compartimos
entre nosotros y que estaban, eh, como unidos el uno con el otro. Y yo puse que la falta
del idioma genera la falta de los ingresos económicos, eh, las oportunidades de trabajo.
Entonces [en] el trabajo tienes que hacer lo que te dan … [Turns to Linda] Tu mamá, ¿tú
dices que es contadora? (Linda: Sí.) Ella no tiene el idioma y lo que tiene que hacer es
basarse en la limpieza como tú dices. Entonces eso es bien feo que ella tuvo su tiempo
para estudiar y hacer todo eso y por el idioma que no lo tiene, tiene que hacer otro
trabajo que no es el suyo.
[We identified three problems, which are [inadequate] income, discrimination, and language. We based those on experiences that we shared and that are, um, like interrelated. And I put [on the tree] that the lack of language leads to lack of income, um, work opportunities. So for work you have to take what you get … [Turns to Linda] Your mom, you say that she is an accountant? (Linda: Yes.) She doesn’t have the language and she has to work as a cleaner like you say. So that is very horrible [for her] because she took the time to study [in her post-secondary accounting program] and all that. And because she doesn’t have the language, she has to do a job that isn’t one that she should be doing.]

To illustrate the three problems related to the shortage of income, discrimination, and language, Susana shared the challenges that Linda’s mother faced as an immigrant to Canada. Even though Linda’s mother was trained as an accountant in Colombia, she neither spoke English nor possessed the credentials to practice her profession in Canada. As Linda put it, she “had to” take on a job as a cleaner in order to earn an income. During this conversation, several students also shared their insight on how social institutions like the government and the school system presented them with barriers that placed them behind where they were in their home countries and in positions that were often accompanied by deficit frames of thinking about them. Gabriel, for instance, expressed his ire at having completed secondary school in Guatemala and then being placed in the tenth grade in Canada. For him, this placing back not only delayed his postsecondary education and career plans, but also created disengaging schooling experiences in which he had to take courses that covered material that he had already learned in Guatemala. In the contact zones of the Proyecto Latin@ YPAR course, the students shared their testimonios in ways that were situated in the class’ exploratory dialogues of identifying the problems that they
wanted to probe further, which in turn created a collective resource from which to build their
learning (Prieto & Villenas, 2012).

As the conversation continued to unfold, Linda brought the topics of language and her
Latin@ identity to the forefront. While her testimonio began with a negative set of experiences, it
also revealed a different and contradictory type of discourse that positioned Latin@s as
exoticized caricatures that were also desired. She said:

*En cuanto al idioma ... la gente se ríe porque tú no hablas inglés o que tienes acento. Yo
les contaba que tenía unos amigos policía que se estaban riendo, que “cuando paran a
los latinos” ... pero se referían, buscándole chiste porque era la única latina. Se
estaban riendo de mí ... Pero de una u otra forma eran: “¿Para dónde vamos?” A una discoteca
latina. ¿Qué querían ellos? Aprender a bailar salsa. Critican pero también quieren
aprender de eso.*

[With respect to language … people laugh [at you] because you don’t speak English or
because you have an accent. I was telling them [the group] that I had some police officer
friends who were laughing when they would talk about “Whenever they stop Latinos” …
but they were referring to, they were poking fun because I was the only Latina. They
were laughing at me … But yet in one way or another they would be like: “Where are we
going?” [And then they’d go] to a Latin@ nightclub. What did they want [to do there]?

Learn to dance salsa. They criticize but at the same time they want to learn from that.]

In this observation, Linda presented a paradoxical set of experiences in which her “friends” both
derided Latin@s and yet exalted the activities they deemed as Latin@. For her, this contradictory
imaginary of Latin@s was the product of a longstanding “imperialistic Western gaze” that
positioned them as both “prey” to be both loathed and desired (Guzmán & Valdivia, 2004, p. 218). According to her, this imaginary is derived from some sort of backstory or experience.43

Indeed, the class conversation continued with Susana’s reply to Linda’s comment, in which she attributed the media as the root of the negative stereotypes of Latin@s. Ingrained in the messages portrayed by the media were the influences of ignorance, a history of oppression, and power:

Todos estos, um, estereotipos vienen de la gente que por lo regular conoce nada de Latinoamérica. Solo lo ha visto en las películas y todo eso. Llegamos al punto hasta que nos preguntamos hasta qué punto que las películas son fantasía, y viene tras una historia. Entonces llegamos a una combinación. Es verdad que en Latinoamérica hay drogadictos, hay prostitutas pero en todo el mundo las hay, ¿cierto? Entonces lo que yo les estaba diciendo es que hacen esas películas norteamericanas y eso es … buscar los malos ejemplos … para ellos sentirse superiores. Para que, eh, sus, sus, como, sus cosas buenas aún brillen más … Entonces yo creo que es una combinación de ignorancia, historia, y el poder que tiene el media, que es, ¿es poder!

[All these, um, stereotypes come from people who know nothing about Latin America. All they know is from what they have seen in the movies and all that. We have reached a point that we ask ourselves about the extent to which movies are fantasy, and what comes from history. So we get a combination. It’s true that there are drug addicts and prostitutes in Latin America, but they are all over the world, right? So what I was telling them [my group] is that they make these North American movies … getting the bad examples … so that they can feel superior. So that, um, their, their, like, their things become even more

43 The phrase that Linda used was “si toda la gente tiene un imagen, es por una historia,” which translates to “if everyone has an image [of Latin@s], it is because of some backstory.”
Building upon Linda’s narrative, Susana engaged with an interdisciplinary commentary addressing the topics of history, the media, and the ways in which the latter continues to perpetuate oppressive attitudes towards Latin@s. With her mention of the media, her peers embarked on a more in-depth discussion of various other domains affecting Latin@s, particularly in the context of U.S. imperialism. Susana, however, also questioned the veracity of the information presented in school books and other texts, indicating that it was the government who manipulated the information so as to give its country a more positive representation:

Estuve conversando con mi papá, quien vivió en los Estados Unidos, y me estaba diciendo que los libros y los textos de la escuela ocultan tantas cosas para ellos sentirse bien … Todo viene tras el gobierno, ¿no? El gobierno siempre quiere tratar de hacer que su país se vea mejor.

[I was talking to my dad, who had lived in the United States, and he was telling me that the school texts and books hide so many things so that they can feel good about themselves … Everything comes from the government, right? The government always tries to make its country look better.]

Indeed, this connection to state control led to a pivotal moment that would later inform the students’ overall research question and their commitment to conducting work that would explore the different social institutions that most affected their lives as Latin@s, particularly in the Canadian context. Touching upon issues of the media, the law, and economic systems such as the workforce, the students expressed their conviction that the interactions between these social institutions, especially in a capitalist Western context, “marked” them in racialized ways that
positioned them at the lower rungs of Canadian society. Consider this conversation excerpt, in which Mariano opined that the government was complicit in this oppressive positioning:

*Hay un filósofo que dice que “Yo pienso y por lo tanto lo soy”, ... pero yo digo que las personas piensan y dicen lo que soy, y, ah, eso es algo muy importante. Y eso va al estado, a la economía. Y el estado, a ellos les interesa una economía en que nosotros hacemos un trabajo determinados como latinos ... Ellos no abren las fronteras solamente porque dicen que sí. (Using an imitating voice and wildly waving his arms about) “¡Ay vengan! ¡Bienvenidos!” No. A ellos les interesan tener trabajadores baratos ... Ellos saben. Nosotros no tenemos el idioma. Nosotros no tenemos las oportunidades tan grandes y [que] vamos a tomar todo lo que podamos tomar. No tanto nosotros que somos otra nueva generación pero nuestros padres. Ellos, ellos tienen que llegar aquí y ver cómo trabajar, como poner comida en la mesa, y no le [sic] importa el poco que les pagan. Eso viene todo del estado. Es estado se da cuenta de que no solamente vienen ellos, ... sus hijos ... nos ven crecer y empiezan a decirnos como somos y quiénes somos, con [los] medios de comunicación, con la historia, cambiando la historia ... Pero allí tienen ese control. Nos quieren mantener en esa base de trabajadores, eh, trabajadores baratos. Por eso empiezan a poner violencia contra nosotros.*

[There is a philosopher who says “I think and therefore I am”, … but I say that people think and say what I am, and, ah, that is something very important. That relates to the state, to the economy. And the state is interested in us doing jobs that are set aside for us as Latinos … They don’t open up the borders just for the sake of it, as in (In an imitating voice and wildly waving his arms about) “Oh, come! Welcome!” No. What they are interested in is keeping us as cheap workers … They know that we don’t know the
language, that we don’t have such big opportunities and that we will take whatever we can get. Not so much us as the younger generation, but rather our parents. They, they have to come here and find a way to work, even if they are paid very little, so that they can put food on the table. All that comes from the state. The state knows that it’s not just them that come, … their children, … the state sees us grow and starts to tell us what we are like and who we are, through the media, with history, which they change … But they have that control. They want to keep us in that workforce, uh, cheap labour. Because of that, they impose violence against us.]

Mariano’s detailed sociological explanation, which not only spanned across different institutions but also across generations, resonated with his peers, some of whom offered similar explanations for the oppressive circumstances facing Latin@s in Canada and the U.S. The more the students collectively and critically shared their experiences as Latin@s, the more they realized that they had various challenges in common that not only included the school system, but also social and economic conditions. Indeed, the students’ commitment to exploring these very topics that affected them and their families began a path towards collective action when they bore witness to multiple and similar stories. Martín fervently suggested that this action was necessary as a means of overcoming state-imposed oppression and working towards more equitable opportunities. As he indicated when he shared his experiences as a youth harassed by police when he lived in the United States, “as a group we can do something better … What we need to do is get together, become strong, and not listen to them. Because if we do, we’re not going to get anywhere.” These statements, or rather, calls for action, lead me to the next section of this chapter, which will address this very topic.
2. Experiential learning and action

The collaborative convergence that Martín called for reflected the reasons for which numerous students had enrolled in the course in the first place. Of course, the opportunity to obtain a senior social science credit that was delivered in the students’ choice of language (or language combination) was a key incentive. Nonetheless, the students were aware that this pilot course was built upon the recommendations of other Latin@ students calling for such an initiative, and as such, they were expecting that their work would address the educational challenges facing their community. Germán, for instance, indicated in a written reflection that his participation was premised on the expectation that “al final de este programa hubiera un reporte que manda al Ministerio de Educación ... de esa manera poder cambiar el problema del 40% de estudiantes latinos que no terminan la escuela secundaria (there would be a report that would be sent to the Ministry of Education upon the conclusion of this program ... so that change can be effectuated with respect to the 40% percent early school leaving rate among Latino students).”

While the students in the YPAR course were attending school at the time, they were nonetheless personally aware of the effects of early school leaving, either through relationships with people who had actually left school prior to graduating or through their own thoughts about doing so. At the end of the semester, Miguel shared that:

there were a lot of people that I knew in my school. When I first came to Urban High in my Grade 9 year there were a lot of Latinos there but then eventually they just didn’t go.

They dropped out or I don’t know what happened, and then I see them again and they’re like they don’t go to school anymore and are doing construction work.

In their written work, both Mariano and Martín referred to such circumstances as being part of what they termed immigrant youth “struggles,” and they realized that such challenges were not
as isolated in the Canadian context as they had previously thought. Indeed, the continuous sharing of negative experiences across the various domains of Canadian society led students like Martín to find that he was “not alone in this struggle.” This discovery of commonalities also provided the students with common topics of concern that would allow them to further explore “the interplay between culture[s], social location, and societal systems of power and privilege” (McDowell, Goesling, & Meléndez, 2012, p. 367). In turn, this collective inquiry paved the way to an experiential semester of learning in which the students would not only continue to share their perspectives and stories but also work together in devising and implementing the questions as well as the methods that would drive their research.

A key component of this inquiry and implementation process was the fact that the students were co-researchers who learned about and practiced different ways of doing research. This experiential learning about research, which Fox (2012) refers to as “embodied methodologies, […] which mobilized the students’] critical literacy”, which in turn informed their work (p. 344). Crucial to the development of critical literacy and learning was the youth’s participation in all aspects of the course, including the determination of the grading criteria and weighting towards the final marks. The centrality of the youth’s perspectives and experiences as well as their decisions in determining how their work would proceed helped them gain not only a critical awareness of the issues affecting them, but also a sense of confidence in their knowledge and capacities as researchers. This process of sharing, experience, and learning in turn became a meaningful production that transformed the students’ views of research and how they can be true instigators of change. According to Yadira, learning and change became particularly transformative once the class broke into research sub-groups. As she put it, “everything changed
after we split up the work and formed the groups. That was when my group … when it truly became involved in that it wanted to be part of that change, right?”

To arrive at the change that Yadira described above, however, it was necessary to incorporate a process of scaffolding. During the first three weeks of the course, for instance, the students began to learn about each other and recognize the connections between their experiences as Latin@ youth. Through these conversations, they began to develop ideas about the themes that they wanted to explore further. An activity that became an especially useful foundation from which to synthesize ideas for the themes of the class’ research was the gallery walk, which involved the posting and examination of all the work that had been done in the previous weeks. The UHS hallway outside our regular meeting place was an ideal venue for this activity, as it provided a continuous wall on which to view and ponder all the student work as a whole. The purpose of posting all this work, which included the Latin@ concept maps, the problem trees, and the body maps, was for the student-researchers to devise a list of recurring themes. During this examination, each student was tasked with devising a list outlining reoccurring topics as well as themes.

In the weeks that followed, the students engaged in a process in which they would work with each other and the facilitators to find common themes and to create draft questions for their overarching work. While this work was necessary, there were times in which it created some tensions and frustration. During one conversation, the students debated the meaning of the term
and proceeded to discuss issues like the ways in which immigration was related to achieving happiness. In the following conversation excerpt, Ricardo used his father’s experiences as a point of reference to disagree with his classmates’ assertions that Latin@s were happy in Canada. His peers responded by placing the term “happiness” in a context that compared the opportunities that were available to them in Canada and those that were not in their home countries. Consider the following dialogue:

Mariano: *Alegre es de latino, es de tener esa comunidad.*
Yadira: Así que esa palabra se referencia a esa palabra de siendo latino, de esa actividad que hicimos. Por eso la pusimos porque nosotros nos sentimos orgullosos, felices.

Ricardo: No sé. Entiendo tu punto ... es parte de ese sentimiento.

Luisa: ¿Te puedo preguntar algo? ¿Tú cuánto tiempo llevas aquí?

Ricardo: Diez meses.

Luisa: O ... porque es, de pronto tú no te sientes tan rico aquí porque, llevas poco tiempo. Pero pues igual, a mí me parece que este país es bueno porque me da muchas oportunidades.

Ricardo: Mi padre tiene, doce años viviendo aquí y él no vive feliz acá.

Yadira: Pero depende, eso ya....

Ricardo: Espera. Porque se supone que la vida, que tú vives es en un lugar que es tuyo ... y de un momento a otro tienes que mudarte de ese lugar [incomprehensible], y en el resto de tu vida tú solamente piensas regresar ... Y entonces, ¿tú sabes dónde quiero llegar?

Gabriel: Lo que haces es generalizar porque yo me siento alegre acá, estoy feliz.

Luisa: Yo también. ....

Mariano: Por eso ... como estaba diciendo Gabriel que es un estereotipo porque todos no nos sentimos iguales, no tenemos los mismos sentimientos. Sí, entiendo que es una palabra muy grande pero como ves, hay mucha gente que está feliz de estar aquí pero hay muchos otros que no se siente así porque les falta sus raíces.

[Mariano: To be happy is Latino, in other words, having that community.

Yadira: What the word means about being Latino comes from that activity that we did.

That’s why we put it there because we feel happy and proud [to be Latin@].
Ricardo: I don’t know. I get your point, … it’s part of the feeling.

Luisa: Can I ask you something? How long have you been here?

Ricardo: Ten months.

Luisa: Oh … because it’s, maybe you don’t feel so happy here because you have been here for a short time. But all the same, I think that this country is good because it provides me with many opportunities.

Ricardo: My dad has been living here for 12 years and is not happy here.

Yadira: But it depends, that still …

Ricardo: Hang on. Because suppose that you live, that you live in a place that is yours … and from one moment to the next you have to move from that place [incomprehensible] , and for the rest of your life you are only thinking about returning … And so, do you know where I am going with this point?

Gabriel: What you’re doing is generalizing because I feel happy here. I am happy.

Luisa: Me too …

Mariano: That’s why … like Gabriel was saying, it’s a stereotype because we don’t all feel the same way, we don’t have the same feeling. Yes, I get that it’s a really big problem, but as you see, there are many people who are happy to be here. But there are also many others who don’t feel that way because they miss their roots.]

At this point, Rubén interjected with a question about the desacuerdo (disagreement) that was unfolding in the class and posed the question about how it fit into the immigration experience and in turn, how the relationship between the two concepts could be explored in the students’ research projects. This interjection produced a thinking process among the students, which in turn contradicted their romantic impressions that the research process was straight-
forward. Despite the realization that their work, like any inquiry, would not be a one size fits all piece of work, they felt that they still needed to do the work and arrive at some conclusions addressing their research questions. As Mariano observed, happiness:

"es una palabra tan grande que se tiene que definir en términos de nuestro grupo ... lo que necesitamos es tener la definición que es más apta para nosotros y para lo que estamos haciendo. (Rubén: ¿Y qué estamos haciendo?) [The class laughs.] Exactamente. Todavía no lo sabemos pero como el grupo de latinos, lo de inmigración, como, o sea, ... pero de pronto encontrar una mitad. Pero con eso volveríamos al mismo problema, y eso es el problema con cualquier investigación porque siempre se llega a un punto donde no importa qué bueno sea, que hay que generalizar."

[is a word that is so broad that it needs to be defined in the context of our group … what we need to do is to come up with a definition that is the most appropriate for our group and for what we are doing. (Rubén: And what are we doing?) [The class laughs.] Exactly. We still don’t know, but as a group of Latinos, that of immigration, like, in other words, … but perhaps we can find a middle ground. But with that we will return to the same problem, which is the problem inherent in any research, which is that there will always be a point that no matter how good [the work] is, there will be generalization.]

The act of talking through different perspectives of happiness and their connections to the immigration experience became a pivotal point in the learning of the students for two key reasons. Firstly, the very act of discussing varying points of view on happiness among Latin@s in Canada provided the youth with the opportunities to hear each other and to think through the ways in which they would employ the term in their work. Secondly, the discussion reinforced the fact that the immigration and settlement experiences of Latin@s and their families in Canada
were just as diverse as they were. What was especially important about this point was the fact that while the students also confirmed that they shared negative experiences like discrimination and language barriers, they nonetheless recognized and affirmed that Canada provided them with many opportunities, particularly as youth in the high school system.

An analysis of the students’ final reflections and focus group evaluations reveal that the students perceived the overall group formats – both in terms of the whole class and the research sub-groups – as contexts that helped them learn in ways that promoted ownership and collegiality. According to Luis, the sharing of experiences and community building provided a context from which to collaboratively engage in conducting surveys with his group. This foundation also helped this shy student approach potential participants in Toronto’s Latin@ community with a greater sense of preparation. As he noted:

El curso me gustó, creo que cuando salimos más preparados que si hubiéramos salido al principio aunque reconozco [sic] que nos llevó un tiempo … el grupo de encuesta se encontró con una comunidad muy grande.

[I liked the course. I think that we were more prepared when we went out than if we would have gone out right at the start. I recognize, however, that it did take us a long time … the survey group encountered a very large community.]

For some of the students, this action of experiential learning and research required going outside of their comfort zones and interacting not only with their peers in a collective project, but also with others in other social domains during the process. When discussing his learning during his group’s field work, Daniel asserted that his action on the field yielded a personal dimension to his experiential learning. In his work, he encountered a variety of reactions from the people he approached, which ranged from apprehensive and dubious to eager and willing to share. As
someone who considered himself introverted, the processes of interacting with different people in environments outside of the Proyecto Latin@ contact zone allowed him to engage with multiple experiences of learning about embodying his group’s research and the ways in which he and his participants figured into this work. In his words,

_Bueno, por mi parte yo aprendí como, o sea, como antes era a veces un poco cerrado a la gente. O sea, era como que no me abría tanto a la gente y que la forma [en que] teníamos que hablar con todos y cambiar … eso me ayudó ahora, yo sé, como ser más sociable … Cuando tenía que hacer mis surveys yo tenía que hablar con toda la gente, con todos tipos de gente. Entonces yo aprendí de muchas personas, [que] dicen ¿qué vas a hacer con el proyecto y cómo va a servir? … Fue una experiencia que yo he ido a la iglesia, hablando con la gente, y compartiendo … muchas personas me felicitaron._

[Well, in my case I learned, like, in other words, like before I was sometimes a bit introverted. In other words, it was like I didn’t open up so much to others. And given that we had to talk to everyone and change … I know that has helped me now, like to be more sociable. When I had to implement my surveys, I had to talk to everyone, all kinds of people. So I learned about many people, [who] would say, “What are you going to do with the project and what is its point?” … It was quite the experience having to go to the church and talking as well as sharing with others … many people congratulated me [on my work].

The very tasks of working outside one’s own comfort zone to interact with other community members and put the group’s research questions to work shaped Daniel’s course experiences and learning. In turn, these interactions helped him learn not only more about the Latin@ community in Toronto, but also about himself as an individual and a member of that
community. As Ponder, Veldt, and Lewis-Ferrell (2011) state, implementing experiential learning that is action oriented provides students with hands-on experience that allows them to actively participate in their own learning in ways that increase their feelings of self-confidence, motivation, and connection to their communities. The feelings of self-confidence were further fomented through the collaborative support systems when out on the field. Juana, who was another member of Daniel’s research group, noted that she sometimes experienced “frustrating part[s] … when not everyone would be nice to us … but that’s when the teamwork comes and we helped and supported each other.” The content and relational scaffolding before the implementation of the field work, however, helped the students help each other in buffering some of their less favourable interactions with their potential participants.

As both Luis and Daniel have suggested, this prior preparation had positive implications on their personal and work-related experiences while out in the field. Juana’s comment adds the point that the collegial relationships that developed during the semester served as important sources of support when the tasks of obtaining surveys became difficult. Such support not only helped facilitate the process of conducting the group’s fieldwork, but also helped to strengthen each youth’s self-concept as a researcher whose work was necessary and important. The continuous processes of critical reflection and dialogue, then, provided them with both the relational connections as well as the socio-academic capital to undertake research as youth-researchers seeking educational change in their community. In the next section, I will discuss some data excerpts in which the students discuss the change that they experienced as youth-researchers in the Proyecto Latin@ YPAR course.
3. Transformation

Taken together, the processes of critical reflection, dialogue, as well as experiential learning and action give rise to a “new sense of awareness [in which youth] come to see themselves as having options for controlling their own lives and dealing with constraints which had before been perceived as given and beyond their control” (Mezirow, 1978, p. 103). While these tenets are important and crucial to the processes of transformative learning, they in themselves do not constitute transformative learning. As Dirxx (2012) points out, “gaining more information, learning a new skill, developing a new or different attitude, or even acquiring a new role or occupation may reflect effective learning experiences, but they alone do not indicate the kind of experiences … [that constitute] transformative learning” (p. 400). To know that learning has been transformative requires a shift in consciousness, which is the “experience of existence. We develop our consciousness in the continual encounter between ourself and the social and material world” (Newman, 2012, p. 42). As Freire (2000) would put it, this shift in consciousness, or rather, conscientization, “refers to the process by which people become knowing subjects” who obtain both a profound comprehension of their social context and of their abilities to enact change in their lived realities (p. 65).

It must be noted that the transformation to which the students refer is neither uniform nor linear. While they all mention learning and change, a closer analysis of the examples demonstrate transformative learning on both group and individual levels. To more coherently discuss the notion of change in this chapter, I will organize the following data excerpts according to four categories: 1) changed perceptions of social structures; 2) an increased commitment to continue working towards social and educational change; 3) a changed sense of self-confidence and leadership; and, 4) a changed understanding and enactment of one’s own cultural identity.
and values. While the first two categories point to broader conceptualizations of change addressing the students’ frames of reference, or rather, understanding of the world around them, the latter two involve personal transformation.

i. **Changed perceptions of social structures.** Some students expressed their views that the Proyecto Latin@ YPAR course prompted different and more complex ways of understanding the world around them. For these youth, much of this change centred on the different social institutions and the ways in which they figured into the lived experiences of Latin@s in Canada. Germán, for instance, indicated a changed understanding about “the outside influences as we discussed about factors that affected students, such as media, school and educational systems … [and] how these factors are a big part of students (In this case I) [sic].” As he shared on another occasion, his participation in the course was premised on his interest as well as commitment to research that would have concrete implications for Latin@ students in Toronto. Through the continuous group discussions during the Proyecto Latin@ YPAR course, he and his peers arrived at a more in-depth understanding of the ways in which social institutions influence widespread perceptions as well as policies and in turn, infiltrate their educational experiences as Latin@s.

For Yadira, the re/creation of the social structures and power relations affecting the experiences of Latin@s in Canada was a possibility, especially given her views of the power of collective voices and effort. However, she also noted that the recognition of such inequitable power structures and their re/creation required open yet challenging conversation, which at times could uncover one’s own complicity in perpetuating inequitable power dynamics. She shared that a key moment in her learning in the course occurred during a gender workshop facilitated by a guest speaker, in which the males and females reflected on their own gendered identities. She indicated that:
Entre todos los desafíos a los que nos enfrentamos y de una manera u otra también descubrimos una serie de prejuicios generacionales que nos han marcado y que de pronto este país los rompa por el sistema de libertad que tiene su sociedad.

[In one way or another and within all the challenges that we encounter, we also discovered a generational set of prejudices that have marked us. Perhaps these can be ruptured in the free society that is present in this country.]

Yadira’s words revealed both her sense of recognition of the group’s own complicity in sometimes maintaining the status quo as well as her hopefulness that latinidades in Canada can indeed take on new and different forms. Indeed, this hopeful conceptualization of latinidad has multiple implications for Latin@s in Canada. As I had discussed in Chapter 4, shifting latinidades in Canada encompass hybrid conceptions of factors such as gender, nationality, and language. Here, Yadira speaks not only to these changing latinidades but also in the changing social contexts and societal perceptions of Latin@s that she hopes time will bring.

Yet at the same time, the actions and words of some of the students pointed to the very pervasiveness of the social structures that created oppressive conditions for Latin@s, particularly when it came to gender. This pervasiveness was evident despite the students’ assertions that they had changed their views of the ways in which the social institutions affect the lived experiences of Latin@s, there were some youth who insisted that the topics of oppression necessitated more detailed examinations addressing their multiple and interlocking identities. From the very beginning of the course, Susana vociferously expressed her critical perspectives on the social expectations facing women, including those that addressed the ways in which they should look, behave, and dress. Her critique of the inequities that she observed between males and females became even more pronounced during her group’s project work. In one instance, she became
upset and denounced the fact that – as Mariano described it later in his final reflection – “most of the work was carried by [her].” Indeed, there was an instance during the course in which the adult co-facilitators addressed some of the tensions occurring in the scope of the group work, after which some students, like Mariano, tried to make amends by “try[ing] to help in however way [he] could, from doing extra work with her to staying up till late at night making decisions on what to do with the unfinished work or the other helpers of [the] group.”

While the adult facilitators’ intervention may have guided the students’ recognition of the gendered consequences of their participation or non-participation in the group work, it also helped them realize that they too were often complicit in the enactment of the pervasive ideologies dictating gender social roles and expectations. In a small group conversation at the end of the course, Martín admitted that while he often made comments in jest that pointed at people’s gender identities, he also noticed that these comments garnered different reactions from different people. He shared that “I joke, joke around men as much as I joke about females, you know? But once it turns to females they don’t like it too well and when they talk about men, they laugh their asses off.” Despite this tension pitting males and females in opposition to each other, Martín also pointed how he learned that the effects of patriarchal ideologies continue to pervade the present in spite of women’s rights legislation. What he learned was that he and his peers must become more aware of their complicity in perpetuating oppressive mindsets if they are truly concerned about changing “sexism. I don’t know about the next generation, you know, but it seems to be that it is a big problem … I learned that … time didn’t really change even although they put in laws and putting more power to the opposite sex.”

These comments on the necessity for the students and their peers to embody the changes that they call for are illustrative of their realization that their actions also – whether consciously
or not – contribute to the social constructions and imaginaries that create gender inequities. In turn, these inequities perpetuate the colonial patriarchal structures that provide males with more power and privilege than females. Martin’s insights demonstrate that social change is a process that not only requires individual as well as collective reflection, but also commitment to action.

ii. An increased commitment to continue working towards social and educational change. Connected to the notion of contesting and re/creating new and different ways of understanding as well as embodying social constructions were some of the students’ expressed commitment to continuing to work towards change even after the end of the course. Yadira, for instance, reflected on her experiences throughout the semester and opined that her learning was not only practical, but also instigated her life-long desire to work towards change for her community:

_Hoy cuando miro atrás y veo todo lo que aprendimos, ... todas las actividades, métodos de búsqueda y herramientas de aprendizaje me parecieron [sic] muy buenos ... realmente te permite[n] investigar y aprender algo que muy difícilmente se podría olvidar ya que marca puntos importantes en nuestras vidas ... [R]ealmente me comprometí con mis compañeros y mi comunidad, realmente quería y quiero seguir siendo parte del cambio para mi gente._

[When I look back today and see all that we have learned, … I feel that all the activities, research methods and learning tools were really good … they really allow you to research and learn something that will be very difficult to forget, given that they mark important points in our lives … I truly became involved with my classmates and my community. I really wanted and continue to want to be a part of the change for my people.]
Yadira’s reflexive commentary points to the various layers of learning that she experienced as a student-researcher in the Proyecto Latin@ YPAR course. In addition to citing the activities and research as “difficult to forget,” she referred to them as important life markers, which in turn are imbued with communal hopes for continued change – change that she would like to continue to effectuate as a knowledgeable researcher and community member.

Other youth, including Juana and Germán, indicated that their initial participation in the course was based on their expectations that their work would help inform future endeavours addressing the education of Latin@ youth. Melisa, on the other hand, was adamant that her class’ initial goals necessitated work that would extend beyond the timeline of the semester. As she put it, “my future expectations are for our investigation for a solution to Latino student dropout to continue searching … I hope the next generation will be inspired to take over the search!”

The opportunities “to take over the search” were made possible by UHS and the TDSB in a follow-up course the following year that focused on continuing the work of Melisa’s cohort of students. In fact, some of the other students in the Proyecto Latin@ YPAR course, including Luciana and Nicolás, also opined that their research necessitated further work, and provided their input in the planning of the follow-up course, which was aptly entitled “Community in Action.” Nicolás in particular was interested in continuing such youth-centred work, and stated at the end of the YPAR course that he “was thinking of working on another project similar to this one.” True to their words, they subsequently enrolled in this co-designed course as did their peers Sebastián, Luis, and Sofía. While Mariano and Susana had graduated from high school the previous year and were attending post-secondary institutions, they both provided their guidance to this cohort of Latin@ youth on numerous occasions, including their insight on the research process and the themes that they generated within.
The continued participation of these students is telling of not only their connections with the YPAR course and the sense of community that it created for them, but also of their commitment to sustaining the work in which they had engaged together. Indeed, it was them who had suggested the course title “Community in Action” and who had voiced their desire to extend their work beyond their initial semester in the Proyecto Latin@ YPAR course and into further initiatives with Toronto’s Latin@ community. Through this subsequent course, the youth would also be afforded the opportunities to continue to build their leadership capacity as mentors for the incoming students. I will discuss this course in further detail in the conclusion of this dissertation.

Here, I must also mention that this follow-up course was facilitated by Mónica and Elizabeth, which not only sustained the relationships between them and the students with whom they had worked the previous year, but also the pedagogical practices that were central to the work of the Proyecto Latin@ YPAR course. Of course, I cannot speak for all the students and assert that each and every one of them experienced transformative learning through the Proyecto Latin@ course. Asides from the fact that I have not kept in touch with all of them, what also must be considered are each individual’s own perceptions of her or his learning and the course itself as well as her or his social contexts at the time. While each student delineated her or his learning at the end of the semester, it must also be recalled that not all learning constitutes transformation (Mezirow, 1997). As I have mentioned in several instances in this dissertation, particularly in Chapters 3 and 4, social locations and contexts entail multiple factors and affect people’s experiences as well as perceptions of the world around them. While some students

44 I first made this point at the beginning of this chapter.
experienced a particular connection with the YPAR course that yielded transformative learning, other students may not have experienced the same kind of learning.

Despite these considerations, the fact that numerous students described how the Proyecto Latin@ course transformed their perceptions of themselves and their world point to YPAR as a critical pedagogy that creates vast individual and collective possibilities for youth engagement and learning. While the youth described their own individual learning, it must be considered that they engaged with this learning through the collective trajectory of the course. A key component of this collective trajectory included the dialogic activities of the course, which entailed the students’ voices and concerns as Latin@ youth and their explorations of these issues. In turn, these critical conversations provided them with different ways of seeing the world around them.

iii. A changed sense of self-confidence and leadership. Perhaps the most significant examples of transformation among the students are the ones that illustrate changes in their sense of self-confidence and leadership. Such transformative learning at the personal level was most evident among the students who both appeared and indicated that they were shy. In his final reflection piece, Nicolás stated that he was “muy timido a veces [sometimes very shy]” and that he aimed to “mejorar ... la participación [improve his participation]” in class. In the videotape of the class discussion on knowledge, Nicolás is seen nodding his head and taking many notes. When Rubén asks him if he wanted to share some of his perspectives on the topic, he is met with silence: “Nicolás tiene mucho anotado. ¿Cuál es, cuál es, la diferencia entre saber y conocimiento en inglés? Los dos se llaman knowledge. ¿Alguien? [Nicolás has a lot written down. (to Nicolás) What is, what is the difference between knowledge and to know in English? The two are known as knowledge. Anyone?]”
While it could have been that Nicolás’ participation at that specific time was his intense listening and writing down of his peers’ perspectives, in the weeks that followed he began to exhibit other ways of contributing to the class and exuding leadership qualities. During the group work phase of the course (and in its follow-up), for instance, he and Luciana were in charge of the arrangements for the making of the class’ Proyecto Latin@ t-shirts. Nicolás also took on a key role in recruiting participants for his group’s data collection, which entailed the making of mixed-media collages and focus groups addressing issues of happiness. The following year, he practiced his public speaking skills as a presenter at a well-attended session at the 12th annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, which took place in Vancouver.

In his final reflection, Nicolás indicated that his best and most memorable moments in the course were the ones in which he developed new relationships with his peers, course facilitators, and members of the Latin@ community who were affiliated with a local Spanish language radio station. As a youth interested in music production, the relationships that he developed with the people in the radio business were pivotal in the development of his community leadership role as a radio co-host. Additionally, a consideration of the changes in which Nicolás engaged with others in different social contexts from the time he first entered Proyecto Latin@ to the present demonstrates learning that is truly transformative. In a recent Facebook conversation in which I asked him about his radio work, he indicated that in addition to commencing his own show, he has also engaged in production and sound engineering work. He shared that:

‘Comenze [sic] mi show de radio el año pasado, aún sigo siendo uno de los presentadores, además soy el productor e ingeniero de audio porque estoy a cargo de controles. El programa sucede todos los domingos de 6 pm a 8 pm através de [station name]. El programa es mayoritariamente en español pero usamos ambos lenguajes a
veces. Trabajo con un equipo de 6 jóvenes más, todos de diferentes backgrounds.
Nosotros decidimos un tema y de ahí nos basamos para crear un guion y ese guion se presenta a la coordinadora para aprobación. Sigo haciendo música, y la considero urbana/hip-hop y me baso en temas tales como problemas sociales y el amor, amor hacia la pareja, la familia, los amigos, etc.

[Last year I started my show. While I am still one of the hosts, I am also a producer and do the sound engineering work since I am in charge of the radio control system. The program airs every Sunday from 6 to 8 pm on [radio station name]. The program is mostly in Spanish but we sometimes use both languages. I work with a team of 6 more youth from different backgrounds, and together we decide on the themes of the show from which we create our script. We then take the script to the coordinator for her approval. I still make urban and hip-hop music, and I focus on themes like social problems, love, love towards one’s significant other, family, etc.]

Indeed, Nicolás’ presentation skills have expanded beyond the initial context of the Proyecto Latin@ YPAR course and into the community domain, which in turn have rendered him an admirable level of public respect as a youth-researcher, radio show host and producer, and musician. I am friends with him on Facebook, and over the past two years I have seen his posts documenting his radio work and music career. I have seen photos depicting him interviewing people for his radio show and e-flyers for events in which he has been scheduled to perform. Over the past two years, Nicolás has transformed from a quiet and shy student to a confident and well-respected public figure. As he put it in both his final YPAR course reflection and in our most recent set of Facebook conversations in the summer of 2013, “muchas puertas se me han abierto, en esto del proyecto y también en mi carrera musical. Además he conocido muy
buenas personas e hice [sic] nuevos amigos [many doors have opened for me in terms of this project and also in my music career. In addition, I have met many good people and made new friends].”

This ongoing relational aspect has been made evident in Nicolás’ radio station work through the ways in which he has continued to embody what Chávez and Soep (2005) term “youth led inquiry” (p. 409). This work, which entails a team of youth collaborating in the development and production of youth-centred media, is illustrative of the key tenets of YPAR, which is not only the participation of young people but also the joint sustaining of social justice pedagogies aimed at bettering their lived experiences and conditions (Campbell, Hoey, & Palmer, 2001).

iv. A changed understanding and enactment of one’s own cultural identity and values. Here, I return to Melisa, the shy Canadian-born student of Ecuadorean parentage. In the fourth chapter, I indicated that she was initially apprehensive about enrolling in the Proyecto Latin@ YPAR course because of her Canadian nativity and English dominance. As her friend Daniel shared, at first she was unsure as to whether she was a Latin@ and whether others in the course, who were mostly immigrants, would view her as such. Nonetheless, she did enroll in the course and put in solid effort to engage with her peers and many of the class tasks in Spanish, particularly with respect to the group research project.

By the end of the course, it became evident that Melisa felt that she was a part of what she called “our Latino community.” In addition to being one of the two presenters opening the course’s first public presentation in front of a large audience, she also represented her group at an academic conference in the United States. During our Facebook conversation in May 2013, she
indicated that she “learned to be more confident with presentations and [her] background.” When
I asked her what she meant by background, she responded that the course:

changed my background because I’m more confident in the sense that I have a different
nationality, that being able to speak another [language] has given me an advantage in this
country because they need people who can speak other languages. So for those like me or
for those that don’t speak English as well, they can improve and use it to their advantage
rather than seeing it as a barrier. So if I’m applying for work I’m more confident and I
can say that I am bilingual.

Through the above words, Melisa reveals a variety of themes relating to the changes in
the ways in which she perceives herself culturally and linguistically. Firstly, she indicates a
drastically changed view of her vision of Latin@s in Canada, which in turn dispelled her own
initial preconceptions that they were Spanish-dominant immigrants from Latin America. While
she recognized that language was just one of the many factors involved in latinidad, she also
affirmed that the YPAR course’s role in increasing her Spanish-language proficiency provided
her with social, academic, and cultural capital that yielded increased opportunities and
confidence in her post-secondary endeavours. For Lantolf and Yañez (2003), such language
immersion and growth contexts become transformative processes when an individual “constructs
his or her own unique psychological understandings of the language” (p. 97). As Melisa
suggested, her participation as a youth-researcher in the Proyecto Latin@ YPAR course not only
provided her with a sense of belonging in what she termed as a “family of Latinos [sic] students”
but also an increased sense of confidence as someone with a different nationality and language
abilities.
This transformation of the ways in which Melisa internalized her experiences with the course and applied them to her future work is illustrative of Mezirow’s notions of agency and change. In addition to joining the course and subsequently feeling a sense of belonging with the group, Melisa created new systems of meaning that posited her Ecuadorean heritage and English dominance as advantages and opportunities for learning rather than as hindrances. While her English dominance and Canadian birth afforded her multiple privileges throughout the school system and other domains, her increased sense of identification as Latin@ led her to take on the opportunities to continue to improve her Spanish after the end of the course and work towards social justice initiatives focused on Latin@ youth. Two years after the conclusion of the Proyecto Latin@ YPAR course, Melisa continues to exude her transformation from a shy girl to a vibrant youth who is confident about her identity as a Latin@ and her abilities to pursue her educational and career aspirations. Such perspective transformation and the continued enactment of this change is very telling of how critical and student-centred approaches to schooling creates vast possibilities for youth.

**Conclusion**

I began this chapter with Yadira’s account of how her learning in the course “completely changed” her life. Indeed, Yadira was not alone in expressing the transformational impact of the Proyecto Latin@ YPAR course, which points to the ways in which the critical and youth-centred pedagogy of YPAR opens up vast possibilities for transformative learning.

Drawing upon and extending Mezirow to include both the individual and collective dimensions of transformative learning, I argued that the community built in the YPAR course created dialogic as well as generative forums for a transnational and youth-centred trajectory of
learning, action, and change. In order to illustrate the processual and scaffolding trajectory of the transformative learning that I described in this chapter, I presented the data through 3 categories: 1) critical reflection and dialogue; 2) experiential learning and action; and 3) transformation. While in the first category I described some critical conversations in which the students talked about and probed the issues affecting them, in the second category I described how the student-researchers followed up on their conversations in order to initiate their plans of action.

Because transformative learning occurred in different ways among the students, I further divided this section to describe changed perceptions of social structures, increased commitment to continue working towards social and educational change, and a changed sense and enactment of self-confidence and leadership. This last sub-section chronicled the transformative learning as described by Nicolás and Melisa both at the end of the course and during subsequent in-person as well as Facebook interactions with me. The purpose of these discussions was to document the longer-term impact that YPAR can have on the learning and actions of Latin@ youth both in school and beyond.

While the Proyecto Latin@ course impacted the students in different ways, I would like to underscore the vast possibilities that YPAR presents for individual and collective learning that is transformative. As I mentioned earlier in this chapter, the course was offered for the second time and involved the input and design of some of the youth in the course that I document in this dissertation. Moreover, the second offering of the course was accompanied by a section for students of Portuguese-speaking descent, who comprise another group of students identified by the TDSB as one that has been underserved by the school system.

As I close this chapter, I would like to reiterate the necessity of rethinking education and engaging students with their learning in ways that are relevant and meaningful to them. The
critical and student-centred pedagogy of YPAR is an example of how this rethinking of education could look like. Indeed, YPAR with Latin@ (and Portuguese-speaking) youth has taken on a continued presence at Urban High School through a Saturday program that began in February 2014. Here, I would like to point out that Nicolás is participating in this program as a youth mentor! So far, he has provided his expertise with media-related tasks such as the scripting and presentation of audio-casts as well as his commentaries on some of the topics covered in the previous two course offerings. Such continued participation, as I mentioned earlier in this chapter, points not only to the personal connections that the YPAR course has created but also to the long-term commitments to co-creating leadership capacity as well as social and educational change.
The Conclusion

Present and Future Directions for the Education of Latin@ Youth: A Testimonio Making the Case for YPAR in all Schools

It is now the end of February 2014. My workday has just finished and I am settling into my usual seat at a coffee shop on the University of Toronto campus. As I stare out the window and at the streetcar that passes by, I reflect on how the Proyecto Latin@ YPAR course continues to figure into my academic and professional practices. Indeed, on my way to this coffee shop I had been talking to Karen Galeano on the phone about our plans for a Saturday program for Latin@ youth that happens to be based on the Proyecto Latin@ YPAR model. When I first embarked on this research journey six years ago, I would never have thought that it would go in the direction that it has. Indeed, the Proyecto Latin@ YPAR course has and continues to shape both my philosophies and practices related to the schooling of Latin@ youth. The Proyecto Latin@ YPAR course and the paths that it has created lead me to assert – with an even stronger conviction – that YPAR is an alternative student-centred pedagogy that engages students in ways that extend beyond school and into the other multiple areas of their lives.

Indeed, my professional trajectory leading to my current employment as an Instructional Leader for the TDSB office of Equity and Inclusive Schools has helped facilitate the circumstances that led to the Saturday program that I describe above. Little did I know when I

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45 I first introduced Karen Galeano in the introduction of this dissertation. She was one of the TDSB staff members with whom the Proyecto Latin@ research team collaborated for the exploratory phase of the work. At the time, she was an Instructional Leader for the TDSB’s Equity department, which is now called Equity and Inclusive Schools. Since then, she has become an administrator and is now co-facilitating the Equity Studies courses with me at Urban High School.

46 As previously mentioned in the introduction of this dissertation, my role as an Instructional Leader for Equity and Inclusive Schools involves working with teachers and administrators in the implementation of equity and inclusive practices and curriculum in schools in the southwest region of Toronto, which serve students ranging from Junior Kindergarten to Grade 12. This work involves consultations, professional development, curriculum resourcing, and the development as well as the implementation of programs targeting specific groups of students or topics.
was offered the position that I would serve the southwest region of Toronto, which includes Urban High School. When the opportunities came to take on specific board-wide portfolio items, I immediately opted to work with initiatives and curriculum related to students of Latin@ and Portuguese-speaking heritage so that I could somehow extend what had been accomplished through Proyecto Latin@. As I have mentioned in both the introduction and at the end of the previous chapter, the Proyecto Latin@ YPAR course led to two sections of a follow-up course – one for Latin@ students and another one for students of Portuguese-speaking descent.\(^{47}\) In fact, I met with both the Principal and Student Success teacher of UHS in early October 2013 to discuss such plans, and again with the full support of Executive Superintendent Spyropoulos, we began to put these plans into motion for the implementation of another Saturday course program at the school that would be based on the YPAR model.

A fortuitous addition to these circumstances was my partnership with the TDSB’s Social Sciences Instructional Leader on the board’s rollout of the new Social Sciences and Humanities curriculum, which includes a new Equity Studies subdiscipline. This subdiscipline comprises four new senior courses: Gender Studies (Grade 11), Equity, Diversity, and Social Justice (Grade 11), Equity and Social Justice: From Theory to Practice (Grade 12), and World Cultures (Grade 12). This rollout is significant in that the TDSB is one of the few school boards in the province that is offering the courses and the only one to have created resource guides for these courses thus far. I have reviewed and edited these resource guides, and the process of doing so has provided me with a more in-depth knowledge of the new curriculum and its learning goals. This new curricular focus on student-centred research as well as a social action component seemed, at

\(^{47}\) Of course, the Portuguese-speaking cohort requires that a Portuguese-speaking teacher facilitate the course in ways that are relevant to the enrolled youth. Here, I will also mention that youth of Portuguese-speaking descent have also been identified by the TDSB as a group facing academic challenges.
least to me, as an ideal avenue through which to implement and model how YPAR can fit into teaching and learning in Toronto schools.

The Saturday program at Urban High School began almost four weeks ago and has a combined enrollment of 54 students plus a waiting list! Initially, I had projected no more than 36 or so students between the Latin@ and Portuguese-speaking cohorts, especially in consideration that the classes would be starting earlier and would include neither lunch nor bus tickets. Although this year’s program has students representing 7 different schools, I was nonetheless (pleasantly) surprised by the numbers. This year’s Latin@ cohort includes 5 of the students who were enrolled in the follow-up course that was co-facilitated by Elizabeth and Mónica in the Spring of 2012. Here, I will also add that Nicolás is also participating in this course as a volunteer mentor for his peers. I had been keeping in touch with him over the past three years, and his sisters had been enrolled in the follow-up course as well. As such, he had been keeping informed about the happenings of our work with Latin@ youth at UHS even after he graduated from high school and college. Indeed, Nicolás has been making valuable contributions to the class; in the first class, for instance, he helped his peers with the scripting and production of audio-casts about stereotypes.

Taken together, the high enrollment numbers and the continued participation of students who had already worked with the Proyecto Latin@ course and/or related initiatives are telling of the necessity of providing students with a forum through which to critically engage with and provide their own input in their education. Two weeks ago, Karen and I distributed exit cards to

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48 In recent years, the TDSB has had budget cuts, which has made it very difficult to obtain funding for expenses like transportation and hot lunches. I did, however, secure a breakfast program for both classes, especially in consideration of the earlier start time and the fact that some students in the class work late hours on Friday, which in turn precipitated my worry that they would rush to class on Saturday without eating breakfast.
garner the students’ feedback on what they had learned and what they wanted to continue to learn. The class that day covered topics of race/ethnicity, gender, power, and privilege through a format that included excerpts of academic literature and personal anecdotes from us facilitators as well as the students. When we looked at the exit cards, there were clear and consistent themes about the students’ personal connections to the class topics and their desire to continue to engage in these topics. As one student put it, “I learned about identity categories and power. I’ve lived some things of that but never learnt to talk about it … [and want to know] how to help the Latin community, thing [sic] we can do.” Another student expressed her desire to learn more about “gender and identity of who I am” and added a comment in which she expressed her personal connection to the instructors, stating that “I love you both😊.”

What is particularly of note with this student is that a teacher at her home school told me that she was disengaged and “at-risk.” Yet every Saturday in this program so far – and while she has to travel about 1.5 hours to get to UHS – she is one of the first to arrive and is keen to provide her input in our class discussions. I have yet to see the disengagement about which I was briefed, but what this situation tells me – and what I want to emphasize not only through this dissertation but also through my practice – is that the critical student-centred pedagogy of YPAR is an alternative approach that frames education as a relational endeavour that is relevant to the lives of the students. When youth have the opportunities to collaboratively and directly engage in their education, their learning can take on meaningful and transformative directions.

Every time I think about the Latin@ students that I have met in my professional and academic practice and the academic challenges that they have so poignantly described, I become even more certain that traditional forms of teacher-centred schooling do not foster student engagement and achievement in the ways that YPAR can. Indeed, the challenges facing my
former student Antonio as well as the Proyecto Latin@ students point to the very ways in which institutional policies and practices do not adequately serve the needs of Latin@ students. As the youth themselves have pointed out, curriculum needs to be student-centred and relevant in order for them to become and remain engaged. In the contact zones of the Proyecto Latin@ YPAR course, the student-researchers shared their perspectives on *latinidad* in the Canadian context and the ways in which it figured into their social contexts and experiences. This student-centred and relevant approach in turn helped create continuous opportunities for building meaningful relationships, which in turn helped foster the space to probe not only difficult tasks and topics, but also conflicts and disagreements.

**The Research Questions**

My dissertation sought to better understand the processes of self-identification as Latin@, community, engagement, and transformative learning in the spaces of the Proyecto Latin@ YPAR course. Through a transnational Latin@ feminist theoretical framework and a YPAR methodology, I explored the following research questions:

3. How do Toronto public high school students who self-identify as Latin@ construct, enact, and negotiate their conceptions of *latinidad*?

4. How do Latin@ students conceptualize community and how do they engage with these conceptualizations in the urban Toronto context?

5. How do the processes of identification and community engagement shape transformative learning in Latin@ youths, particularly in the context of youth participatory action research?

Each of these research questions was explored in separate data analysis chapters. While
each of these chapters points to a specific aspect of the YPAR process in Proyecto Latin@, I would like to underscore that the themes explored in each of these chapters are interrelated and interdependent on each other. While the first research question took up the processes of self-identification as Latin@, the second research question built upon these processes of self-identification to explore how they figured into the students’ conceptualizations of community and community engagement in the space of the YPAR course. The third research question considered the students’ final coursework as well as my conversations with them after the course had ended in order to explore the processes of transformative learning within the Proyecto Latin@ YPAR course – which was a contact zone of students who self-identified as Latin@ and who engaged with each other in different ways as a community of learners. In the sections that follow, I will summarize the findings of each of these data analysis chapters.

The Research Findings

Self-identification as Latin@

In this chapter, I explored how the students brought up topics of language, phenotype, geographical background, and gender and they ways in which they played out in determining whether and to what extent a person would be considered Latin@. Indeed, the students’ own heritage and perspectives were diverse, and pointed to the complex and fluid nature of latinidad in the Canadian context.

In the discussion on language, I pointed out how the students had different and sometimes conflicting perspectives on the extent to which a mastery of the Spanish language would determine a person’s ability to claim latinidad. Language ability was an especially controversial topic, particularly among the Canadian-born Latin@s; while some of them felt the
need to assert and demonstrate their abilities to fluently communicate in Spanish, others opined that an identification with the language was enough to be able to consider oneself Latin@. This perspective was strongly voiced by students of mixed backgrounds and who came from homes in which other languages were spoken.

When it came to conversations about phenotype, the students did acknowledge that they had their own biases when identifying people as Latin@ (or not). The students who did not fit the image of the tanned and dark-haired Latin@ often found themselves having to explain themselves in order for their self-identification as Latin@ to be accepted by others, if at all. Such circumstances were often the case for students of mixed parentage and students who came from families with a migration history that also involved parts of the world outside of Latin America, including countries like Palestine, Lebanon, and Italy.

This diversity of migration histories, including those that Guillermo and Salma described, illustrate that Latin America is also a receiving land of immigrants with their own diverse histories and sociopolitical contexts. While we learned that Guillermo’s Italian background was related to the historical context of Italian immigration to Uruguay, through Salma’s story we learned about her roots as the descendants of Lebanese Muslims who had settled in Colombia several generations before. The cases of Candace49 and María Fernanda50 also addressed the diversity of latinidad in ways that evidenced mixed parentage stemming from the multicultural contexts of Canada, which again point to the transnational nature of latinidad. In María Fernanda’s case, her mixed background allowed her to switch identifications according to her social contexts, which evidenced how latinidad can be (re)shaped and (re)negotiated.

49 Candace’s mother was Anglo-Canadian and her father was from Bolivia.

50 María Fernanda’s mother was born in El Salvador and her father was of Portuguese descent.
The students also talked about how gender roles and expectations ascribed to Latin@s figured into how they took up their *latinidad*. For María Fernanda, being a Latin@ female meant embodying a particular image and set of behaviours that cast her as a sexualized and doltish being. For Mariano, on the other hand, his roles as a Latin@ male were unclear and contradictory; while he expressed his respect for and commitment to advancing gender equity, he also admitted that his behaviour was sometimes sexist, specifically when it came to sharing particular tasks during the course.

**Community engagement**

In the fifth chapter, which covered topics of community engagement, I drew upon the notion of the contact zone to examine the complex interactions of camaderie and conflict between and among the students and adult facilitators. Through this discussion, I made two central arguments that challenged both the prevalent romantic conceptualizations of community and community engagement as well as the static perceptions of relationship-building as a linear and happy process.

Before providing evidence for these arguments, I delineated the concept of community to include both the classroom community as well as the entities and people outside the school that the students considered as being part of their community. A key component of this inclusion into the youth’s conceptions of community was their perspectives of whether or not the pertinent people or entities were considered to be aligned with their identities and goals.

To substantiate my arguments and to trace the different components of community engagement, I drew upon Miao and colleagues’ (2011) model to put forth a 5 tenet model that incorporated topics of: 1) shared goals; 2) varied and equitable opportunities for participation; 3) continuous community and relationship-building; 4) knowledge sharing and co-creation; and, 5)
leadership, organizing, and the building of social capital. A central thread through this model was collaborative dialogue and deliberation.

An exploration of the first tenet of shared goals yielded insight on how common visions among the students regarding the educational experiences of Latin@ students in TDSB schools was an important component to community engagement. While YPAR was a participatory project, an exploration of the second tenet of varied and equitable opportunities for participation yielded insight on the importance of affording students with different options and modes of participation. This particular point challenged prevalent conceptualizations of participation as loud and frequent spoken exchanges.

The third tenet of continuous community and relationship-building brought forth the point that the relational aspects in YPAR mandated ongoing efforts rather than a one-time endeavour. This ongoing relationship-building was necessary to create bonds of trust and openness that would help facilitate difficult conversations in times of conflict. This ongoing relational work, which took place in various formats during the official instructional time and during mealtimes, also helped foster opportunities for the fourth tenet of community engagement – knowledge sharing and co-construction on the topics affecting the student’s lived experiences.

The combination of these four tenets provided a fruitful ground for the fifth tenet of community engagement, which is leadership, organizing capacity and the building of social capital. Indeed, throughout the course the students developed new skills and created new relationships that in turn provided them with social capital that they could apply in different ways outside of the course. These opportunities for student development were brought forth in different ways, including the different experiences, areas of expertise, and connections that each of the four adult facilitators contributed to the course. The guest speakers also brought with them
knowledge and resources that became useful to the students’ coursework and interests, which in turn provided them with even more capital not only to help advance their shared vision of conducting and sharing research on their community, but also their own educational and career goals. While we saw Melisa, Daniel, Germán, and Sebastián organize and deliver a workshop for their peers at a Latin@ student conference, we also saw how other students like Nicolás and Luciana’s new relationship with some guests with connections to a local radio station led them to their own weekly radio show.

As Nicolás told me two years after the course had ended, his experiences with the Proyecto Latin@ YPAR course provided him with both the skills and the connections through which to move closer to his dreams of producing as well as performing music, music which covers themes of social justice and community. The contrast between Nicolás’ initial description of himself as a shy and quiet student and his current profile as the community leader that he has become (and continues to be) points to the ways in which the student-centred pedagogy of YPAR can engage youth with their community and in turn lead their learning in transformative ways.

**Transformative learning**

I began the sixth chapter with Yadira’s account of how her learning in the course “completely changed” her life. Indeed, Yadira was not alone in expressing the transformational impact of the Proyecto Latin@ YPAR course, which points to the ways in which the critical and youth-centred pedagogy of YPAR opens up vast possibilities for transformative learning.

Drawing upon and extending Mezirow to include both the individual and collective dimensions of transformative learning, I argued that the community created in the YPAR course created dialogic as well as generative forums for a transnational and youth-centred trajectory of
learning, action, and change. In order to illustrate the processual trajectory of the transformative learning that I described in this chapter, I presented the data through 3 categories: 1) critical reflection and dialogue; 2) experiential learning and action; and 3) transformation. While in the first category I described some critical conversations in which the students talked about and probed the issues affecting them, in the second category I described how the student-researchers followed up on their conversations in order to initiate their plans of action.

Because transformative learning occurred in different ways among the students, I further divided this section to describe changed perceptions of social structures, increased commitment to continue working towards social and educational change, and a changed sense of self-confidence and leadership. This last sub-section chronicles the transformative learning as described by Nicolás and Melisa at the end of the course and during subsequent in-person as well as Facebook interactions with me. The purpose of these discussions was to document the longer-term impact that YPAR can have on the learning of Latin@ youth.

**Significance of the Research**

This dissertation puts forth implications for various fields of research, including YPAR literature, curriculum studies and schooling, particularly with respect to the TDSB and schools across Canada, Latin@-Canadian studies, as well as Latin@ feminist and transnational studies. In the sub-sections that follow, I offer my comments for each of these fields.

**YPAR literature**

In this dissertation, I have pointed out the possibilities that YPAR brings for learning that is meaningful and transformative at the individual and collective levels. As we saw in cases like those of students such as Melisa and Nicolás, the transformative learning that YPAR can
bring fosters youth development as agents of personal and social change (Power & Allaman, 2012). While we saw Melisa grow from a self-described shy student to a confident public speaker, we saw Nicolás also grow from a self-described shy youth to a well-respected musician and radio show host. Such cases in conjunction with the overall testimonios from the youth with regard to their learning and collective endeavours with each other illustrate the ways in which YPAR allows Latin@ youth to co-construct the knowledge and tools to implement change.

Another contribution of this dissertation to the YPAR literature is its emphasis on how YPAR can indeed be carried out within the institutional parameters of schools and the school board. I make this assertion fully cognizant of the facts that there is no one-size-fits all approach to doing YPAR, and that there are various factors that shape how YPAR plays out, including the people involved, how power is discussed and shared, and the resources that are available. In spite of all these considerations, I will also point out that there are particular institutional conditions that make the implementation of YPAR possible within the school-based context, particularly in the context of the TDSB.

As indicated in the introductory and methodology chapters, the Proyecto Latin@ YPAR course was facilitated through an existing partnership between OISE/University of Toronto and the TDSB that involved people with different areas of expertise ranging from the logistical tasks of gaining space permits and student records to an in-depth knowledge of the Ontario social sciences curriculum to the administration of the budget. For all these tasks to move forward in the first place, however, it was necessary to garner the support and approval of Executive Superintendent Spyropoulos as well as the Principal of UHS, the school that would host the YPAR course. As I discussed in the methodology chapter, all these human resources were especially crucial given the very tight timeline that we had between the drafting of the ethics
protocols to both the TDSB and the University and the first class, which required a space, students, supplies, a plan for the class, and food.

The success of the course as a whole, however, was also contingent on the overall involvement of all these key people and their relationships with each other as well as with the students. The fact that both Mónica and I were (are) TDSB teachers with the qualifications as well as experience teaching the social sciences was advantageous to the secondary school credit-based format. Moreover, our employment status with the TDSB facilitated other components to the work, including access to the UHS computers, which could only be used by board employees and students, and in Mónica’s case, the ability to submit grades through the board’s online system.

When it comes to the delivery of the YPAR course itself, I will say that I have been asked on several occasions for a lesson-plan binder, which to me underscores the point that education, at least for many, continues to be a rigidly defined and conceptualized institution. I have also been asked about the “integrity” of the course and how the adult facilitators are able to deliver provincially mandated curriculum for three different senior social science courses while centering them on the students’ voices and inputs. My response to such questions is that one needs to understand the organization and purposes of curriculum documents. While each curriculum document includes an overall description and a set of strands outlining the knowledge and skill sets that students must achieve, they nonetheless provide teachers with a great deal of autonomy with how and what they teach. Indeed, the “how” and “what” of delivering curriculum is addressed in the TDSB’s 2010 Achievement Gap Task Force draft report, which outlined 19 specific recommendations for initiatives for addressing the academic challenges of racialized youth, including Latin@ students. One of these specific recommendations addressed the
necessity of equipping teachers and schools with “the capacity to engage the student in ways which allow the student to feel that he or she has the power to make life changing choices. This is achievable if the student feels centred in the environment” (p. 11). While this recommendation is well-aligned with the voices of the students who had called for a course like the Proyecto Latin@ YPAR course, it also provides educators with even more of a rationale for which to engage with YPAR in their work with students.

This dissertation also contributes to the scholarly literature on YPAR through its discussion of the challenges of doing such work, particularly in school-based contexts. As mentioned in the dissertation’s introduction, much of the YPAR literature tends to focus on the positive aspects and overlook the potential dilemmas that can arise. In the methodology chapter, I delineated how these dilemmas, which include power imbalances between the youth and adults— and even among the youth themselves— can present uneasy moments in the contact zones of the YPAR work.

In the school context in particular, additional challenges emerge that position adults in tense situations in which they must balance specific course expectations while remaining true to the participatory nature of YPAR. Such challenges became especially salient for me, whose multiple positionalities, including those of teacher and graduate student, created some tense moments of apprehension. In the fifth chapter, for example, I documented how I refused to repeat a students’ self-description as “Sexy Student” because of my beliefs about a teacher’s boundaries— even when my role in the YPAR course was that of a facilitator and graduate student researcher. While such tensions related to doing YPAR are necessary to outline, I nonetheless want to underscore that YPAR— if practiced conscientiously with and alongside the youth— can open up vast possibilities for rethinking schooling and youth community
engagement. In order to foster these vast possibilities, however, it is necessary for the adults to be cognizant and open to not only talking about social location, but also sharing power with the youth.

**Curriculum studies and schooling**

Through the students’ testimonios, feedback, and my interactions with some of them after the end of the Proyecto Latin@ course, I have provided illustrations throughout this dissertation to assert that YPAR engages students in ways that extend beyond the classroom and into other domains of their lives. Indeed, the students across both the exploratory and YPAR phases indicated that traditional teacher-centred and Eurocentric curriculum was not very connected to their lived experiences as Latin@ youth. Indeed, they resolutely expressed their desires to actively and collaboratively engage with their schooling. Such strong perspectives as well as the transformative learning illustrated in this dissertation also point to the very need for a shift in teacher training and the approaches that such training takes when it comes to education and power. Here, I refer to training both in faculties of education and in ongoing professional development for experienced teachers.

Teacher training programs are diverse and vary from cohort to cohort and from institution to institution; as such, learning about social locations and power that rupture with traditional teacher-centred perspectives may be present in some programs but not in others. While enrolled as a student at OISE/University of Toronto’s Bachelor of Education program in 2005, I learned about lesson planning, child psychology, and the curriculum for my subject specialties, which were Spanish and the Social Sciences. These topics were covered through teacher-centred frameworks that captured a “teacher as savior” perspective that so often casts students – particularly racialized youth – as needing the control and knowledge of the teacher.
When I reflect upon my own learning in the Proyecto Latin@ course, I always think about how I wish my cohort in the Bachelor of Education program could have learned about teaching in a different way, especially in the diverse and hybrid contexts of Toronto. The traditional ways of teaching that we teachers learn about – and often practice – in such programs perpetuate the deficit frames of thinking that position students, particularly racialized youth, as academically deficient and at fault if they do not succeed at school. As a racialized Latin@ woman who comes from an inner-city neighbourhood, my teaching philosophies were not entirely shaped by my teacher training program, but I will say that being a racialized teacher does not in itself mean an understanding of the impact of social location and power in education.\(^5\)

This is not to say, however, that teacher training programs never address issues of social location and power in education. In fact, my sister Elizabeth was enrolled at OISE/University of Toronto’s Bachelor of Education program in 2011-2012, which was the academic year after the Proyecto Latin@ YPAR course. She did learn about social location, multiple identities, and power, but this learning occurred via her coursework and practica through the program’s Inner City cohort. Combining this learning with that from her experiences with the Proyecto Latin@ course, she incorporated a YPAR framework in her work with a summer camp at the University of Toronto. Her students were mainly from Brazil, Mexico, and Colombia, and she incorporated their concerns about the social issues in their countries through a class community-based format, which in turn helped the youth share their views with each other.

\(^5\) Here, I recall a particular incident during a professional development workshop that I colleague and I delivered on the topic of equitable leadership. When we presented board data that pointed to particular groups of marginalized students, including Black, Latin@, and Roma youth, a Black teacher pointed out how Roma youth were uninterested in their education and asked what the point was of trying to engage them if they would not finish school anyway. We asked her if she knew anything about the historical contexts of the Roma and she admitted that she did not. Such uninformed and deficit frames of thinking point to the necessity of engaging teachers with conversations about the historical contexts of marginalization as well as the importance of shifting the ways in which power plays out in the school system.
while strengthening their English skills. Such an example, which has its roots in the Proyecto Latin@ YPAR course, point to how such learning for both adults and youth should be extended to and applied across ALL teacher education programs.

It does not suffice, however, to only engage teacher candidates with YPAR and related topics of social location and power differentials in education for two reasons. Firstly, large numbers of recent teacher education graduates have been unable to find employment in teaching or in related fields. As such, they would not be physically able to incorporate such practices in the school system or in other educational settings. Secondly, there are many more teachers in the school system whose teacher training reflects the very traditional adult-centred approaches to schooling that the students themselves have critiqued. In some of the professional development modules that I deliver as an Instructional Leader, I have encountered some teachers who experience difficulty talking about power differentials and who insist that they do not see race or any other identity marker but rather students. Such a colour-blind approach hinders the opportunities to identify, deconstruct, and contest social injustices as well as inequities (Husband, 2012). In consideration of the TDSB student data that clearly illustrates stark achievement gaps among racialized students, it becomes even clear – at least to me – that such colour-blind approaches that neglect conversations of race and power will continue to perpetuate such gaps.

According to a 2014 Ontario College of Teachers report, new teachers have been facing dire employment conditions over the past few years, pointing out that “four in five first-year new-Canadian teachers in 2013 report they are unemployed – they were on the job market during the 2012-2013 school year and could not even get a foothold in daily supply teaching” (p. 4).
The schooling of Latin@ youth

This dissertation points to how Latin@ youth can experience transformative learning when they are provided with the opportunities to directly engage with and shape curriculum that is relevant to their lived experiences. The data presented in this dissertation also point to the need for Latin@ students to feel that their voices are not only heard, but also valued and incorporated into their schooling experiences. In order for the students to want to share their voices in the school, however, it is crucial for them to feel connected to the curriculum as well as to the adults who will be working with and alongside them. Indeed, the students’ descriptions of their own processes of community engagement and transformative learning through the YPAR course illustrate how relevant and relational curriculum challenges the traditional and subtractive forms of schooling that do not adequately serve or relate to the needs of Latin@ youth (Valenzuela, 1999).

The schooling of Latin@ and other marginalized groups in the TDSB

As mentioned in the beginning of this dissertation, a cohort study released in 2006 revealed that Latin@ students experienced one of the TDSB’s highest rates of early school leaving as well as the lowest rates of academic achievement. A more recent cohort study, which was released in 2011, reports a significant decrease in the early school leaving rates of Latin@ students. While at first glance this decrease may signal a sign of improvement for the overall achievement of Latin@ youth in TDSB schools, they continue to be the group with the second highest rates of early school leaving.

Indeed, the TDSB acknowledges that a great deal of work remains to be done with respect to the schooling of particular groups of students, including Latin@s. For instance, the current TDSB Board Improvement Plan for Student Achievement (BIPSA) indicates that:
[t]he percentage of students achieving at the provincial standards from the lower achieving groups (e.g., students from Black, Spanish Speaking, and Aboriginal) will be improved by a minimum of 15% in Reading and Writing and expected to reach at and/or above the level of the TDSB results by June 2017 as measured by Report Cards and EQAO assessments.53

In order for these ambitious plans to even begin to take place, there needs to be a shift in the ways that education works in TDSB schools. The Board has recently released its Years of Action framework, into which the above-named BIPSA is embedded. In particular, the Years of Action pillar of student achievement and well-being calls for a variety of plans to promote caring school cultures that involve culturally relevant pedagogy and the opportunities for the voices of students to be implemented in its schools and programs. This dissertation can provide some real-life TDSB examples as well as some insight about how the Years of Action pillar of student achievement and well-being can be mobilized through YPAR.

Very importantly, this study also points to a youth-created conceptualization of what it means to be a Latin@ student in Canada and in the Toronto context in particular. As we have seen throughout this dissertation, the students co-created a Latin@ youth collective that not only challenged deficit perspectives of Latin@s, but also an engagement with the research process that many of them embodied in different ways in their lives after the course. As we saw in the discussions of students like Nicolás and Melisa, a critical, participatory, and action-oriented approach to education has vast implications for the academic success and engagement of Latin@ students. Like I previously mentioned in this conclusion, this participatory model has been

53EQAO assessments are the standardized literacy and math tests administered by the Education Quality and Accountability Office, which is a provincial body that regulates the accountability of schooling in Ontario.
adopted not only for follow-up courses with Latin@ students, but also with students of Portuguese-speaking descent, who are also a group facing significant academic challenges.

**Latin@-Canadian studies**

This dissertation has also outlined how the historical context of Canada’s immigration policy in conjunction with the socio-political conditions of Latin America have created a Latin@ population that is different from that of the United States. As indicated in the first chapter of this thesis, the various “waves” of immigration from various parts of Latin America beginning in the late 1960s created a Latin@ national mosaic within the Canadian cultural mosaic (Mata, 1988). In turn, the multicultural context of Canada and Toronto in particular created *latinidad* – or rather, *latinidades* – in Canada as fluid, contextual, and negotiated in different ways and at different times. I first outlined such negotiations in the theoretical framework when I described how my daughter Isabel negotiated her Ecuadorean, Romanian, and Hungarian identities according to context. In the fourth chapter of this dissertation, I discussed how some students, including María Fernanda, negotiated their own *latinidad* in different circumstances. These discussions point to the necessity of talking about *latinidad* and its hybrid configurations, particularly among second and subsequent generation Latin@s.

Through a discussion of the Proyecto Latin@ YPAR project, this dissertation contributes to the academic literature on Latin@s in Canada in two ways. Firstly, and as I indicated in the first chapter of this thesis, there is an increasing body of academic literature on Latin@s in Canada that tends to focus on adults and on themes such as political participation, labour, and parenting. This thesis creates some “academic space” for a discussion on youth, which leads me to my second point, which has to do with the fact that much of the emerging body of research on Latin@ youth in Canada addresses problems that they encounter.
particularly in the schooling context. While this dissertation also draws upon the academic challenges of Latin@ youth as a starting point, I will reiterate that these academic challenges were gleaned from the voices of the students themselves. The YPAR study that is the focus of this study came from the recommendations of the students; this dissertation provides some insight into how YPAR can address some of the academic challenges described by the youth, particularly those pertaining to student engagement and achievement as well as the conceptualization of education in Toronto schools.

**Latin@ feminist and transnational studies**

Closely tied to this dissertation’s contribution to the field of Latin@-Canadian studies is its contribution to Latin@ feminist and transnational studies, particularly when it comes to conversations about the fluid and shifting nature of *latinidad* in Canada. As I delineated in the theoretical framework, these conversations about *latinidad* in Canada require This point was made in several areas in this dissertation, particularly in the theoretical framework, in which I described how this hybridity reconceptualizes what it means to be Latin@ in Canada and pointed to the ways in which these hybridities connect to many lands, histories, and contexts.

This point of many lands, histories, and contexts was also made to reconceptualize transnationalism, which often tends to be taken up in the academic literature as a two-nation model involving physical migration. In this dissertation, I presented a different picture of transnationalism as one that involved other kinds of movements, flows, and connections between people and ideas (see Lazar, 2011). In a sense, this YPAR study offers some insight into personal, social, and educational movements as well. While we saw students like Melisa grow from a timid and quiet girl to a confident leader, we also saw (and are seeing) how youth like Nicolás continue to apply their learning from the Proyecto Latin@ YPAR course not only via
their own personal achievements, but also through their continued commitment to helping their peers. As I articulated near the beginning of this conclusion chapter, Nicolás has been attending each and every Equity Studies class at Urban High School as a peer mentor. Additionally, he has been helping his peers plan for an upcoming Latin@ student conference and is scheduled to co-facilitate a student workshop on youth leadership on that day. Such instances of continued learning and sharing of knowledge demonstrate how YPAR not only transform a person’s own life, but also his or her ability to build capacity among other members of their community.

Along with these personal, social, and educational movements come the possibilities for engaging both male and female students in transnational Latin@ feminist projects of solidarity. This YPAR study illustrated the learning as well as the often contentious dialogues on gender roles and expectations that took place (and still need to take place) among some of the students. Indeed, the conflicts and disagreements ensuing during conversations about gender as well as during the process of group work point to the very need to engage students in ongoing work on gender. In the space of the Proyecto Latin@ YPAR course, it became apparent that such conversations need to take place between everyone regardless of their own gender identities and through an intersectional approach that also takes up the complex questions of race and ethnicity involved with latinidad in Canada. Such conversations highlight the need to integrate Latin@ feminist and transnational frameworks into curriculum so that youth can obtain the language as well as the opportunities to critically assess their own social locations and in turn engage in social action that will rupture with oppressive practices and attitudes related to gender.

54 See, for instance, the discussion on the heated debate regarding dress and consent, which is outlined in Chapters 3 and 4. I returned to this debate when I presented Martín’s perspectives on the historical longevity of gender binaries, norms, and expectations when I addressed some of the difficult moments between the students in Chapter 5.
55 Here, I refer to a Chapter 6 discussion in which 12th grader Mariano acknowledged how he participated in gendered division of labour, indicating that the only female in the group was left to do the majority of the group’s work.
Here, I will also comment that the organic nature of YPAR in this study meant that feminism – particularly transnational Latin@ feminism – created a variable set of conditions for feminist conversations about gender and other intersecting pillars of identity like race and social class. Indeed, I brought my own lenses as a transnational feminist Latin@ into various components of the course, including reading part of Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands* and conversations in the mixed media collage group about the gendered implications of its members’ roles and actions. However, there were times in which feminist perspectives were not something that the group as a whole wanted to pursue, especially in instances in which their own biases remained ingrained in their beliefs and overtook considerations of equity and social justice. This challenge to transnational Latin@ feminist practice became especially apparent in the heated debate about the relationships between scanty clothing, sexual assault, and consent that I discussed in the third and fifth chapters of this dissertation. While on the one hand several of the female students vociferously expressed their own feminist standpoints about how they should have the right to not have their clothing dictated by men and to be able to voice their own consent, several of the male students countered that scanty dress was a ground for what Martín called “the dogs go[ing] after it.”

This situation was a difficult one; while the adult researchers felt the need to intervene in this conflict, they also felt the need to honour the student-centred principles of YPAR, which included the space for the students to talk through their different points of view and lead their processes of deliberation. Upon reflection of both the situation and the principles of YPAR, I assert that providing and fostering the space to openly talk about gender and equity is an important step towards intersectional conversations involving other identity factors, which are courageous conversations that continue to be silenced in many school settings.
Limitations of this Study

As outlined earlier in this conclusion, the Proyecto Latin@ YPAR course was made possible due to several key factors related to the partnership that already existed between OISE/University of Toronto and the TDSB. This relationship involved people with different areas of expertise whose contributions resulted in a rather smooth and speedy implementation of the course. The process of successfully delivering the course throughout the semester also required a particular set of people and dynamics that cannot be exactly replicated each and every time. This very set of circumstances is in itself a key limitation of this study, as the same opportunities to do a YPAR course in the same way and with the same resources – both human and material – will not be possible for everyone either due to issues of power and privilege.

I became even more keenly aware of the impact of power and privilege at a recent workshop on the achievement gaps facing particular groups of racialized students. During this workshop, which I delivered at the TDSB’s headquarters, one of the teacher attendees expressed her ire at being unable to deliver a YPAR course at her school despite her 18 years of teaching experience and her repeated requests to implement such a program. Besides being taken aback that she knew who I was and that I had been involved with Proyecto Latin@, I suddenly realized how power and privilege create specific opportunities for some and not for others when she referenced both the Proyecto Latin@ and the Equity Studies programs at UHS and accused the TDSB of favoritism towards Latin@ and Portuguese-speaking youth. She questioned why other groups of youth did not have the same opportunities when there was data that clearly evidenced the need for such work with them. While she seemed satisfied after I explained the contexts from which the YPAR and Equity Studies courses came about, I thought about how my relationships,
positionalities, and the circumstances surrounding them, particularly through my employment, provided me with (access to) privileges that others could not so easily obtain.

At the time of the Proyecto Latin@ course, I was a graduate student whose contributions did not involve all the bureaucratic tasks that I now take on for the current Equity Studies course, including those related to budget and being the contact person. During the set-up of this year’s Equity Studies courses, I learned that the implementation of such a program not only required the express consent of the Executive Superintendent of Equity and Inclusive Schools – who was already familiar with Proyecto Latin@ and my work within it – but also of the Superintendent and the Central Coordinating Principal of Continuing Education, whose department would offer the course. Would I have had the same opportunities and institutional capital if I were still a teacher at Etobicoke Collegiate? I certainly do not think so.

**Future Directions**

As I move closer to the end of this dissertation, I continue to have further questions and ideas about the future directions of this research, both in terms of my own practice and in terms of future initiatives for youth. Below, I describe future directions for three areas: 1) feminist research and gender studies; 2) YPAR at more schools and for other groups of youth; and, 3) longer-term research and leadership development.

**Feminist research and gender studies**

As I read the students’ final reflections, I noted an overall pattern of unreconciled observations and questions about gender. While gender norms and expectations were often discussed and debated in class, we never reached any sort of closure. Of course, I do not think that there is any closure to topics of gender but nonetheless think that this is an area that I would
like to explore further, both in terms of my professional practice as an educator and in terms of future academic writing. One area that I would like to come back to is the students’ contestation of gender roles and the ways in which this contestation contradicted their actions, particularly when it came to attitudes about sexual violence and the division of labour. Another area that I would like to explore is how the shifting nature of latinidad impacts (or does not impact) gendered imageries of Latin@s in Canada.

For the Gender Studies component of the current UHS Equity courses, we are probing questions of gender in further detail. So far, we have explored gender identities, norms and expectations, gender-based violence, and media representations. While this exploration is still at its beginning stages, the students have already expressed an interest in engaging in social action initiatives related to gender-based violence in the Latin@ community, including the design and facilitation of a workshop to be presented to other youth. As such, Karen and I have garnered the support of the TDSB’s Gender Based Violence Prevention office and a local community organization to provide the students with the knowledge base and the skills for them to design as well as implement their workshops at an upcoming Latin@ student conference.

**YPAR at more schools and for other groups of youth**

The Proyecto Latin@ YPAR course led to a similar initiative for Portuguese-speaking youth at UHS and has generated interest from other school boards and community organizations across Canada. A future direction that I hope this dissertation will help inform is the implementation of YPAR at more schools and for other groups of youth. Indeed, there are various Ontario Ministry of Education and TDSB policy frameworks that support such work for all groups of students, including the Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy, which suggests that teachers “encourage student leadership by involving students in establishing and monitoring
guidelines for achieving inclusive classrooms” (2009, p. 58). Adding even more clout to the role of student-centred pedagogies is the new Social Sciences and Humanities Ontario curriculum, which has incorporated student-led inquiry and social action into its course threads. The Proyecto Latin@ YPAR course and by extension this dissertation offer some insight as well as an exemplar of how such student-led work can be implemented into schools and for all youth.

**Longer-term research and leadership development**

While I have kept in touch with some of the students since the YPAR course ended almost three years ago, it would be an interesting endeavour to continue keeping in touch with them and to reach out to other students and find out the directions of their educational and career trajectories. A potential area of research that could extend from such an initiative is the development of future Latin@ leaders in the education system as well as in other domains. Such future leadership could have significant impact on the schooling experiences of Latin@s in Toronto schools, who comprise a growing community.

An example of the potential that can be brought about through the leadership of Latin@s is documented in Ek and colleagues’ 2010 article, which documents how two Latin@ leaders engage with and advocate for the needs of the Latin@ community in San Antonio. Through their deep awareness of the inequities facing the community and their commitment to the academic success of Latin@ youth, they advanced the opportunities as well as the resources to help empower them so that they could navigate the education system. The ability to provide such opportunities and resources, however, requires the power and privileges that accompany leadership positions, which in turn generally mandate particular educational and career trajectories. While working with youth towards leadership positions in the education system
would require sustained long-term support, it could result in some very promising outcomes for Latin@ and other groups of youth!

**In Closing…**

In consideration of the themes as well as the potential future directions outlined in this YPAR study, it is more important than ever to push for educational reform in directions that engage students with critical and youth-centered curriculum. Through YPAR, the Proyecto Latin@ student-researchers learned about and through the issues affecting them. Through the relational and dialogic processes inherent in YPAR, the youth developed a repertoire of skills and bodies of knowledge that transformed their views of themselves and the world around them. The lives of these students was their curriculum, and through their action and learning, both during and after the Proyecto Latin@ course, they make a very valuable contribution to the discussion on the future directions of education, which in turn has already begun with them.
Appendices

**All the following appendices have been modified for formatting purposes.**

Appendices beginning with A are for the exploratory phase and those beginning with B are for the YPAR phase of Proyecto Latin@

Appendix A1. Table of events in Proyecto Latin@’s exploratory phase

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Frame</th>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| May 2008           | Meeting of community members, TDSB officials and university researchers at OISE/University of Toronto | • Concern over high rate of early school leaving among Latin@ students in TDSB schools  
• Plans for Proyecto Latin@ as a means of garnering student perspectives on the challenges facing Latin@ youth in TDSB schools |
| April-May 2009     | Recruitment, implementation and data collection             | • 6 school sites across the TDSB  
• 2 focus groups at each school site  
• 33 individual interviews |
| June-August 2009   | Data analysis                                              | • Atlas.ti – reports generated by theme                                   |
| September-December 2009 | Writing of technical report                             | • 4 overarching themes covered in the data: language, socio-economic status, racism and stereotypes, relationships with adults at school |
| January-April 2010 | Dissemination of the findings                             | • Findings were shared through presentations to the students and to other audiences |
Appendix A2. Recruitment flyer

RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS WANTED

What are your thoughts on the educational experiences of Latin@s in Toronto’s public schools?

If you:
√ have Latin American background
√ identify yourself as Latina, Latino, Hispanic, and/or Spanish
√ have at least one parent/caregiver who speaks Spanish at home

then you are a perfect candidate for PROYECTO LATIN@.

Come to our information session to find out how you can get involved and tell us your thoughts in our focus groups and interviews.

When: WEDNESDAY, MAY 5 @ 11:15
Where: FAMILY STUDIES AREA – ROOM 2-18

Pizza and drinks will be provided.
See you there!

Visit us on the Web:
http://cus.oise.utoronto.ca/Proyecto_Latin%40.html
Appendix A3. Project description distributed to schools, teachers, and students

Project Description

We are researchers from the Centre for Urban Schooling at OISE/University of Toronto and we are interested in what makes Spanish-speaking students of Latin American heritage do well in school and what does not. We are working with the TDSB Office of Student and Community Equity. The information learned in this study will be used to develop strategies for increasing achievement levels of Latino/a students in TDSB schools.

Proyecto Latin@ is looking into the insights of Latino/a students about their own experiences in Toronto schools and about their views on students engagement. We want to better understand how students themselves explain the factors that shape their experience and their decision to leave or stay in schools. Based on their own experiences, we want to develop ideas for encouraging Latino/a students to stay in school and strategies for helping them succeed.

We are interested in these questions because a recently released TDSB research report reveals that the achievement levels of students who come from Spanish-speaking homes are consistently low. We will meet with and talk to Latino/a students in order to understand the processes that shape their engagement in TDSB schools. We hope that this project will help the TDSB develop strategies for increasing academic achievement and decreasing the number of students who leave school.
Appendix A4. Parent information letter and consent form

April 20, 2009

Dear Parent or Guardian:

We are a group of researchers from the Centre for Urban Studies at OISE/University of Toronto studying the factors that contribute to the success of Latino/a students at school. In collaboration with the TDSB Office of Student and Community Equity, we are interested in obtaining an in-depth understanding of the various factors that affect the schooling of Latino/a youths and their decisions to stay in or drop out of school. The information learned from this study will be useful to schools in developing strategies and programs to help lower the early school-leaving pattern of Latino/a students in Toronto’s schools.

The External Research Review Committee of the TDSB has granted its approval for this study. The school Principal has also given permission for this study to be carried out in your son/daughter’s school.

Your son/daughter will be asked to participate in 2-3 focus group sessions that will take place either during the lunch hour or after school. Each 90 minute session will involve collaborative activities with other students that deal with their ideas about engagement and success in school. He/she will also be invited to participate in 2 interview sessions. The interviews will include questions about background information (e.g., country of origin), school achievement, career aspirations, and his/her perspectives on the early school-leaving patterns among Latino/a youths in Toronto. Lunch and refreshments will be provided at each focus group and interview session. He/she may withdraw from the research at any time.

Participation in this study is voluntary and will not affect your son/daughter’s attendance in class or his/her evaluation by the school. All information collected will be strictly confidential. After all data has been collected, the students will not be identified individually.

Please indicate on the attached form whether you permit your son/daughter to take part in this study. Your cooperation is very much appreciated. Please feel free to contact Lead Researcher Rubén Gaztambide-Fernandez by telephone at (416) 978-0194 or by e-mail at rgaztambide@oise.utoronto.ca if you have any further questions.

Sincerely,

The Proyecto Latino Research Team
PARENTAL/GUARDIAN CONSENT FORM

I agree to allow __________________________________ to participate in the □ focus group study.

(son/daughter’s name) □ interviews.

I do not wish __________________________________ to participate in the □ focus group study.

(son/daughter’s name) □ interviews.

Parent’s/Guardian’s Signature ___________________________________

Date: ________________________________
Appendix A5. Student information and consent form

April 1, 2009

Dear Student:

We are researchers from the Centre for Urban Schooling at OISE/University of Toronto and we are interested in what makes Spanish-speaking students of Latin American heritage do well in school and what does not. We are working with TDSB Office of Student and Community Equity. The information learned in this study will be used to develop strategies for increasing achievement levels of Latino/a students in TDSB schools.

The External Research Review Committee of the TDSB has granted its approval for this study. The school Principal has also given permission for this study to be carried out in your school. You will be asked to participate in a focus group that will meet 2 times over the term for approximately 60 minutes each. In the focus groups, you will participate in group activities that deal with issues of your student engagement and achievement. You will also be invited to participate in 2 separate individual interviews that will last about 30 minutes each. We will ask you questions about your background information (e.g., country of origin), school engagement and achievement, career goals, and why you think Latino/a students drop out of school. Focus groups and interviews will take place either at lunch or after school. Lunch and snacks will be provided at each session. You may withdraw from this study at any time without penalty. Participation in this study is voluntary and will not affect your attendance in class or your evaluation by the school. All information collected will be kept confidential. After all data has been collected, the students will not be identified individually.

Please indicate on the attached form how you would like to participate in this study. Your cooperation is very much appreciated. Please feel free to contact the research team at proyectolatin@oise.utoronto.ca if you have any further questions.

Sincerely,
The Proyecto Latino Research Team
STUDENT CONSENT FORM

I read the information letter and understand the project and my involvement in it. I have had my questions answered by the research team. I understand that I may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

I agree to participate in (check all that apply):

☐ focus groups
☐ interviews

Name (Print): ______________________________
Signature: ______________________________
Date: ______________________________
Appendix A6. Focus group 1 protocol

Introduction
Thank you all for agreeing to participate in this focus group. We want to remind you first that participation in this focus group is voluntary, and you may choose to withdraw your participation at any point. As you know, the purpose of this study is to better understand how you as students explain the processes and factors that influence whether students stay or leave their schools. We want to know how you define student engagement and what you think are ways in which schools can engage you in your own educational process and support your achievement and success.

First Activity
For this first meeting, we want to focus on your thoughts about the reasons why some students leave and others stay in schools. We have collected a group of newspaper articles about the issue of students leaving schools. We would like you to read these articles and then talk about what these articles make you think about. You might consider the following questions:

Prompts:
Does this article reflect your own experience? Why or why not?
What do you think is missing from this article?
What do you think can be done to address the issues raised in the article?
What would you say causes the issues reported in the article?
What else do you think is important to know about what is reported in this article?

Second Activity
For the next activity, we want you to work in groups of two. We want you to think of five things that would help Latino/a students do well in school. Put them in order on a piece of chart paper. After reading the lists prepared by everyone, let’s consider the following questions:

Prompts:
Why did your group order things that way?
How are the lists similar or different?
Which of these ideas would you say might help the most? Why?
Which of these things would you like to be involved in implementing?
Which of these things do you think would not work? Why?

Thank you again for participating in this focus group. We want to remind you that the discussions we have had are confidential. If you have any other comments or would like to talk with us further, please let us know. We look forward to interviewing some of you. Thanks!
Appendix A7. Focus group 2 protocol

Introduction
Thank you again for agreeing to participate in this focus group and for coming back for a second done. We want to remind you again that participation in this focus group is voluntary, and you may choose to withdraw your participation at any point. For this first focus group, we want to focus on your thoughts about the specific experiences of Spanish-speaking students and the differences between different groups of Spanish speakers.

First Activity
On this chart we have a list of labels or words that often associated with people who have Latin American heritage. Consider the words by thinking about which ones you feel resonate with you and which do not.

Consider the following prompts:
What do these words make you think about?
Which ones of these words do you use to describe yourself? Why?
What do you think other people think about these words? Why?
Where do you think these words come from?
Which words would you add to this list? Why?

Second Activity
Some people argue that the school curriculum doesn’t reflect the experiences of Latino/a students. We want to think with you about what it would mean for the curriculum to be more reflective of your experience. For this activity we want you to work in groups of three. We will give each group a lesson from three different subjects. Each group will think about how you would modify the lesson to reflect your particular experience as Latino/a students. Once you have made your changes, you will share them with the rest of the group. As a group, let’s consider these questions:

Prompts:
How would this lesson help Latino/a students do well in school? Why?
What do you think non-Latino/a students will think about this lesson?
What else might you do to make the lesson more relevant?
How could you help your teachers make these changes?
How would you think your teachers would react to these suggestions? Why?

Thank you again for participating in this focus group. We want to remind you that the discussions we have had are confidential. If you have any other comments or would like to talk with us further, please let us know. We look forward to interviewing some of you. Thanks!
Appendix A8. Interview protocol

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 their decision to drop out of school?
- What would have made a difference in your friend or family member’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 B1. Table of events in the Proyecto Latin@ YPAR phase

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Frame</th>
<th>Actions</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| December 2010       | Rubén and Cristina met with Superintendent Spyropoulos and his team to discuss follow up action with Latin@ youth in the TDSB | • Plans arising from this meeting included funding for a YPAR course at UHS  
• Rubén and Cristina were tasked with completing and submitting the Ethics Review protocols to both the University of Toronto and the TDSB prior to recruiting the students |
| February 2011-June 2011 | Student recruitment  
Implementation of the YPAR course = data collection included  
• written assignments  
• video tapes of student work, presentations, and discussions  
• student research projects | • 4 Spanish-speaking adults who self-identified as Latin@ co-facilitated the course  
• 20 Latin@ students enrolled; each was eligible for 1 of 3 senior social sciences credits  
• The students engaged in their own research projects addressing the levels of happiness and satisfaction among Latin@s in Canada  
• Their methodologies included mixed media collages, focus groups, interviews, and self-portraits |
| July 2011-November 2011 | Data analysis and the drafting as well as the submission of the technical report of findings | • The technical reports were submitted to the TDSB Office of Continuing Education and to Superintendent Spyropoulos |
## Appendix B2. Recruitment text for flyers and electronic boards: YPAR phase

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HEADLINE: Saturdays will never be the same!</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BODY: Latino? Explore our culture for school credit – and fun, friendship and community service!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Come and have a slice and see what it’s all about.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information sessions: Tues Feb 8 3:30pm &amp; Wed Feb 9 noon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students at all levels of English and/or Spanish are welcome.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B3. Parent information letter and consent form

OISE/CUS Letterhead

January 12, 2011

Dear Parent or Guardian:

We are researchers from the Centre for Urban Schooling at OISE/University of Toronto and we are interested in engaging Spanish-speaking students of Latin American heritage with a participatory action research initiative for which they will receive school credit. We are working with the office of the Coordinating Superintendent for Inclusive Schools, Students, Parents and Community. The information learned in this study will be used to develop strategies for increasing achievement levels of Latino/a students in TDSB schools. The External Research Review Committee of the TDSB has granted its approval for this study. The school Principal has also given permission for this study to be carried out in your daughter/son’s school.

Your daughter/son is invited to enroll and participate in a senior level course that will involve the development of research projects that s/he will jointly create and carry out with the other participants. Your daughter/son will be placed according to grade level in either “Introduction to Anthropology, Psychology and Sociology” (HSP3M) and “Challenge and Change in Society” (HSB4M). Each course will be facilitated with Latino/a Studies and Participatory Action Research perspectives and will provide your daughter/son with training in social science research methods. As a student/researcher, your daughter/son will identify areas of interest related to her/his experiences in school and will collaborate to develop the research questions, methodologies, and sharing of findings. In addition to receiving a senior level school credit for her/his participation in the project, s/he will be provided with lunch every class and will receive monthly payments for her/his work as a researcher.

This course is scheduled to take place at your daughter/son’s school every Saturday during the Winter/Spring 2011 semester. The classes will run from 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. and will be facilitated by fully bilingual staff that includes OISE/University of Toronto researchers and a TDSB teacher. We will also regularly consult with the students in between classes at mutually arranged times and dates. As part of the research process, your daughter/son will be asked to collaborate in developing an interview protocol that will be used to understand the student participants’ experiences in the course. These interviews may be audio recorded. All of the class meetings will be observed and the class discussions will be audio and video recorded with the students’ consent.

In this research course, your daughter/son has the right to decide whether and how s/he wishes to participate in any of the research activities involved in this project. S/he may choose to withdraw from the course altogether, or s/he may choose to remain as a student in the course but not participate in the research activities related to the project. As long as your daughter/son remains a student in the course and completes the course requirements, s/he will receive a secondary school credit for her/his participation. In order to receive financial compensation, however, your daughter/son must be involved as a participant in the research, which includes the course
requirements as well as the collection of data, data analysis, and dissemination of the research findings.

Please indicate on the attached form how you would like your daughter/son to participate in this study. Your cooperation is very much appreciated. If you have any questions or would like further information about the study, please feel free to contact Professor Gaztambide-Fernández by telephone at (416) 978-0194 or via e-mail at rgaztambide@oise.utoronto.ca.

Sincerely,
The Proyecto Latino Research Team

PARENTAL/GUARDIAN CONSENT FORM

YES
I agree to allow __________________________________ to participate in the
□ weekly Saturday classes
□ research projects

I give my permission for my child to be
□ audio recorded for this research study.
□ video recorded

NO
I do not wish __________________________________ to participate in the
□ weekly Saturday classes
□ research projects

Parent’s/Guardian’s Signature: ____________________________
Date: ____________________________
Appendix B4. Application to the Proyecto Latin@ YPAR course

APPLICATION FORM
FOR PROYECTO LATINO RESEARCH STUDY

PERSONAL DETAILS

Name: _______________________________ Grade: ___________________

Address: ________________________________________________________

Apartment/Unit: ________________________

City: _________________________________ Postal Code: _______________

Telephone: _____________________ E-mail: ____________________________

OTHER DETAILS
What are some of your special skills that you are most proud of?

What are some things that you would be interested in researching as a Latino/a student?

Why do you think that the Proyecto Latino research study and course would benefit you?

How would you describe yourself academically and/or as a student?
References


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