

**“They wouldn’t go to our School”: Unpacking the Racialization of Latinx Children
through a Civil Rights Lesson in a New South Classroom**

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Introduction

Throughout the U.S., but particularly in the U.S. South, Latinx¹ are the most quickly expanding demographic group in recent years (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). This demographic shift is reflected in classrooms, in which around 10 percent of U.S. schoolchildren are English Learners (ELs), 77.2 percent of which are Latinx Spanish speakers (National Center on Immigrant Immigration Policy, 2010).

In the U.S. South in particular (Gill, 2010; Murphy, Blanchard & Hill, 2001), there has been a drastic demographic shift over the last 25 years due to large numbers of Latinx immigrants that came in response to the demand for low-wage labor (Cuadros, 2006; Marrow, 2011) that accompanied passage of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in the

¹ Out of consideration for scholars of color and others who do not identify with either strictly male or female gender identities who have pointed out the problematic gender binary inherent in terms like Latino and Latina (Ramirez & Blay, 2016; Scharrón-Del Río & Aja, 2015), throughout this article we instead use the gender-inclusive term Latinx.

mid-1990s (Beck & Alleksaht-Snider, 2002). Over this period, several generations of Latinx students have passed through schools in the South (Portes & Salas, 2010), and Southern Latinx communities are established enough (Furuseth & Smith, 2006) that Latinx population growth in the region is driven more by children born in the U.S. than by arrivals of new immigrants (Pew Hispanic Center, 2011). Portes and Salas (2015) have argued that this boom in “post-first generation” Latinx students are helping re-write the racial landscape of the South, effectively creating a “New Latino South.”

This demographic shift has generated significant political backlash. Even prior to the election of Donald Trump, remnants of the Jim Crow era were re-emerging for Latinx individuals in the New Latino South through repressive laws and social customs that segregate undocumented immigrants, which are referred to as the *Juan Crow* laws (Lovato, 2008). The term Juan Crow refers to the laws and policies in the South targeting undocumented Latinx immigrants, which mirror the previous legal structure of Jim Crow Laws. For example, in Georgia, there have been laws passed that prohibit landlords from renting to undocumented people in Cherokee County (McKanders, 2010). In addition, in July 2007, Georgia passed State Bill 529, the Georgia Security and Immigration Compliance Act (GSICA). The GSICA requires law enforcement officers to investigate the citizenship status of anyone driving under the influence or charged with a felony. SB 529 enables police to inquire about the documentation status of anyone who seems suspicious and to report anyone who is undocumented to Immigration and Customs Enforcement (Hing, 2018). With the passage of laws like these, both documented and undocumented Latinx people in Georgia have reported an overall climate of uncertainty and fear in the state (Lovato, 2008).

After the presidential election of Donald Trump, reports about fear from Latinx populations in Georgia and the country as a whole have increased. Reports from the Southern Poverty Law Center showed a post-election “Trump Effect” spike in attacks on Latinx students, with bullies mimicking Trump’s rhetoric (Potok, 2017). The report indicated that 90% of all schools surveyed indicated a negative impact on school climate, and anecdotes abounded of racial slurs, derogatory language and negative incidents, such as that of the Georgia high school counselor who reported that White students had joked about their Latinx peers being deported and having to “go back to Mexico.” Recently, in the vitriolic 2018 gubernatorial election primary in Georgia, two Republican candidates made national news for appealing to their White conservative base by using radical anti-immigrant sentiments. Michael Williams campaigned in a “deportation bus” with “follow me to Mexico” written across the back. His opponent Brian Kemp ran a campaign ad showing him loading and cocking a shotgun before mentioning he has a “big truck” in case he needs to “round up illegals and take them home” (Cummings, 2018). This corrosive rhetoric has led to a rash of bullying attacks against Latinx students in and out of school, and has further increased racialized divisions in schools. More generally, many Latinx students are experiencing post-election toxic stress from fear of the unknown, which has been linked to difficulties with learning and behavior, in addition to physical and mental ailments (Schochet, 2017). It is clear that messages of “otherness” and not belonging are being sent to Latinx students in classrooms throughout the South and throughout the U.S.

In this worrisome political context, one of the most pressing issues in terms of educational equity is ensuring that this relatively new Southern Latinx demographic receives the educational support necessary to ensure success in school settings. The need to provide quality instruction to Latinx students is particularly pressing in the New Latinx South, where unlike

traditional immigrant destinations like California (Suárez-Orozco & Páez, 2008) and Texas (Straubhaar, 2013), Latinx student populations are a relatively recent phenomenon (National Center on Immigrant Integration Policy, 2010). As Straubhaar and Portes (2017) have argued elsewhere, the growth of the Latinx population in a region previously characterized for generations by a Black-White racial divide has meant that for several generations, any conception of the experience of Southern Latinx childhood has remained invisible to educators and policymakers. In this region, most teachers are still monolingual English speakers who have little experience and insufficient training to address the unique set of challenges faced by Latinx children, who are often ELs (Authors, 2018; Howard, 2006).

While Straubhaar and Portes (2017) have begun the process of theorizing a construct of Southern Latinx childhood, as of yet there remain few case studies illustrating what the K-12 educational experience looks like for Latinx schoolchildren in the U.S. South (see Fitts & McClure, 2015; Hamann, Wortham & Murillo, 2015), and the degree to which it does or does not mirror the larger political landscape described above. If we are to begin the process of more effectively training Southern schoolteachers to be culturally responsive to the needs and experiences of their Latinx students, more work must be done to document how Latinx schoolchildren are viewed and racialized by their teachers in the region. In other words, in order for approaches targeting the cultural responsiveness of White teachers to function, we need to fully understand the context in which such approaches will be implemented—we need to comprehend the scope of the problem. This article, drawing on ethnographic data from several years of observation of Latinx children in schools throughout North Georgia, has been purposefully framed as a contribution to this yet-nascent conversation, exploring the racialization of Latinx EL children in a North Georgia classroom.

More specifically, this article draws on a two-year study of participant observations of 37 North Georgia teachers. This was an externally-funded study designed to evaluate the impact on EL Latinx student achievement of 19 of those teachers implementing a culturally responsive pedagogical model called the Instructional Conversation (or IC) pedagogy (Tharp, Estrada, Dalton & Yamauchi, 2000). In the present article, we focus on one observed upper elementary small group social studies lesson which shows particular insight into the processes of racialization of Latinx students that occur in New South classrooms, particularly when the subject matter of the lesson focuses on race (as does this lesson, which is on the life of Thurgood Marshall). Within this lesson, our analysis will pay particular attention to the ways in which the teacher positions herself physically, the way she focuses her attention (in terms of classroom management and participation) on the Latinx students in the group, particularly on one girl we here call Lucia, and on the ways in which the language used by the White children in the group creates social distance between them and their Latinx classmates.

Conceptual Orientation

The arguments we will make in this article are based on several assumptions: first, that Latinx students are racialized in their K-12 classrooms, in ways which negatively influence their school experiences and their learning in school. In her work on Mexican youth in a Texas high school, Angela Valenzuela (2010) argued persuasively that the lack of caring demonstrated by many schoolteachers towards Latinx students has resulted in a learning context that not only does not welcome Latinx students, but sends the message that what they bring to the classroom as Latinx individuals from Latinx communities is not valued, needed or wanted. Particularly in contexts like the New South where Latinx students may be perceived by their classmates and teachers as “the only Mexican in the room” (Kasun, 2015), the school experience for many

Latinx students is one of separation (Kanno & Kangas, 2014) and alienation (Carrillo & Rodriguez, 2016; Straubhaar & Portes, 2017).

Second, this article is based on the assumption that teacher attitudes towards Latinx children and other children of color are malleable, or able to be positively shaped by professional development, and that culturally responsive pedagogies like the Instructional Conversation can have a particularly positive effect on teacher attitudes. We have found this to be true in our own work, in which we have seen training in culturally responsive pedagogy mitigate negative teacher attitudes towards Latinx students in North Georgia (Authors, 2018). Seminal scholars such as Gloria Ladson-Billings (1995, 2014) and Django Paris and Samy Alim (2017) have similarly shown how both teachers' attitudes and students' experiences can be changed for the better through their respective frameworks of culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2014) and culturally sustaining pedagogy (Paris & Alim, 2017).

Unfortunately, negative attitudes towards multilingual students of color are common among monolingual English-speaking teachers (Howard, 2006; Walker, Shafer & Iiams, 2004), who not only typically lack training in how to best teach Latinx students but also feel pressure to attend first to other school-based demands, such as high-stakes testing (Harper & de Jong, 2009). Luckily, other scholars have corroborated our previous findings (Authors, 2018) related to the potential for appropriate training in working with ELs to improve negative educator attitudes towards Latinx students and other populations of color with high numbers of ELs (Fitts & Gross, 2012; Katz, Scott & Hadjioannou, 2009). Particularly if such trainings are based in culturally responsive pedagogy, which encourages teachers to view the cultural and linguistic schema of their Latinx students as a resource rather than a hindrance, studies have found very positive results (Cummins, 2000; Palmer & Martinez, 2013).

However, as asserted previously, if Latinx students are being negatively racialized in their current K-12 classrooms, understanding that context is an essential first step to effectively implementing culturally responsive pedagogical approaches like the IC. It is in that spirit that we here document the ways in which Latinx students have been racialized in one North Georgia upper elementary classroom.

Context

As previously stated, the data to be analyzed here was taken from a larger federally-funded study assessing the impact of teacher training in the Instructional Conversation (IC) pedagogy on Latinx student achievement in North Georgia. The study involved both teachers who were trained in the IC and a group of comparison teachers who were statistically matched as being in similar school settings and working with similar student populations. Teachers who received the training were given extensive face-to-face professional development in the IC pedagogy over a summer, and then followed with intensive coaching support throughout an entire school year. This first year of training was then followed by a second in which treatment teachers received monthly “check-ups” to ensure fidelity of implementation and mastery of the IC pedagogy. Those teachers in the comparison group received only the standard professional development that was offered by their schools or districts.

The theoretical framework upholding the Instructional Conversation model is based in culturally responsive pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2014), which we here define as a curricular framework purposefully crafted so as to recognize and build upon the cultural wealth (Straubhaar, 2013) held by students whose cultural capital does not correspond with that which is valued in traditional U.S. school settings, such as Latinx students in the U.S. South. Tharp, Estrada, Dalton and Yamauchi (2000) designed the IC as a regularly-scheduled teacher-led small

group activity with a clear instructional goal. Instructional conversation (IC) pedagogy is based on five standards that guide classroom instruction: joint productive activity (teacher and students producing together), language development (developing language and literacy across the curriculum), contextualization (making meaning: connecting school to students' lives), challenging activities (teaching complex thinking), and instructional conversation (teaching through conversation). The instructional conversation standard is the keystone of the pedagogy, with all the other standards building upon one another to culminate in it. In an Instructional Conversation, small groups of three to seven students participate in a teacher-facilitated, "adult-like" conversation with an academic goal for about twenty minutes. While the teacher is there to guide the group, he or she is not there should not dominate the conversation—rather, the role of the teacher in an IC is to probe the students' understanding, evaluate their misconceptions and take the discussion deeper (this role will be particularly pertinent when we examine the degree to which the teacher in the class period we will analyze intervenes, particularly relative to one Latinx student). The ostensible purpose of this pedagogy is to provide intensive, differentiated, experiences for students in second language acquisition and academic development by increasing the rate and intensity of vigorous interactions with peers and teachers, while also affording teachers the opportunity to learn about and capitalize on the assets (in the form of background knowledge, language and experience) that individual students bring to the table.

At the time that the teacher in the lesson described here went through our training in the IC pedagogy, we were still honing our own technique in implementing this training. While our focus was on preparing teachers to be culturally responsive, we primarily did so as a means for students to make connections and engage more fully with the content being presented by the facilitating teacher. In other words, the focus of our training on cultural responsiveness was

primarily academic—on using culturally responsive pedagogy to help students engage with and master content through small-group Instructional Conversations. Due to this singular focus on improvement of academic achievement, we regretfully did not specifically address how race might become a factor influencing students’ ability to participate fully in such pedagogical interactions at that time. We also did not specifically train teachers to be aware of both their own racial positioning and how the racial make-up of a small group could influence students’ ability to engage fully in the conversation. In part as a result of our analysis of lessons like the one described in detail here, we have since updated our training to make sure that we directly address norm-setting, goal-setting and the responsibility of the teacher to make sure that each small group is explicitly made a safe space for all participants, with an explicit and specific focus on how such spaces are racialized. Specifically, we train teachers on how to listen to understand where students are coming from, rather than listening while waiting to respond—we model this in our trainings, and teach our teachers to model and facilitate such interactions in turn with their students.

Methodology

Data Collection

Participants for this paper were part of the aforementioned federally-funded larger study involving participant observations in classrooms led by teachers trained in the culturally responsive Instructional Conversation pedagogy. Over the two-year period of the study being drawn on for this article, we conducted participant observations in the classrooms of 37 teachers (19 who had been trained in the Instructional Conversation pedagogy, and 28 who had not), who were placed in several high-poverty elementary schools in North Georgia. These teachers roughly represented the demographics of elementary school teachers across the region, in that

most participants self-identified as White (though several teachers self-identified as Black, and one self-identified as South Asian). The group was also predominantly female, and included both teachers relatively new to the classroom (i.e. within their first five years) and teachers with several decades in the classroom. The participants were typically grouped by school, meaning most participants had at least one other study participant in their same school. Participants came together as a whole group for trainings and debriefing sessions several times a year.

As part of our participant observations, each participating IC teacher was videotaped twice a year while conducting an Instructional Conversation with a small group of students, once during the fall semester and again near the end of the spring semester (in the case of comparison group teachers, they were videotaped only once in the spring, while teaching a small-group lesson using a format of their own choosing). For the purpose of this paper, we focus on the video of one upper elementary teacher, who was chosen because of the nature of the topic covered in her IC group and the dynamic that unfold between the students. The topic of this particular social studies IC lesson was Thurgood Marshall. The purpose of the activity was to focus on the principle of cause and effect in Thurgood Marshall's life—that is, what caused him to take the life path he chose, and what effects came from the legal battles he fought, both as a jurist (who, among other things, was the primary lawyer to successfully argue the case of *Brown v. Board of Education* before the Supreme Court in 1954) and as a member of the U.S. Supreme Court himself later in life. This lesson was video-taped, and that video was transcribed by the authors using InqScribe transcription software. For the transcription process, one member of our team first transcribed the lesson, and then a second member of our research team checked the transcription for accuracy. While all Instructional Conversations and small-group lessons that were recorded, transcribed and analyzed as part of this study were conducted in English, all four

authors are conversant in conversational Spanish, to ensure that any comments in Spanish could also be transcribed accurately.

Data Analysis

Our methodology in analyzing these transcribed small-group conversational interactions is based in critical discourse analysis, which we here use to examine the implicit meanings and assumptions inherent in conversational interactions (Fairclough, 2001; Gee, 1999; Phillips and Jorgenson, 2002; Van Dijk, 2001). We are particularly interested in the implicit meanings that are communicated through conversational interactions between teachers and students, as well as between groups of students, as these interactions reflect and reveal the relations of power between these actors. In the present context of a classroom lesson focused on the history of racial segregation within schools, we are particularly interested in the racial power relations revealed in this conversation.

While critical discourse analysis has been used to draw meaning from various data sources (including texts, journals and speech acts), we here use it primarily to explore the extent to which the Instructional Conversation pedagogy promotes conversational interactions that challenge the traditionally hierarchical relationships existent in New South classrooms with large EL populations (see Authors, 2018). Close reading of transcribed material has been used in other studies utilizing critical discourse analysis that similarly aim to reveal the power differentials inherent in speech acts in educational settings (See Chitera, 2011).

Participants

There are a total of five fourth-grade children who participated in this particular IC group, two of whom are Latinx English Learners (ELs). More specifically, the group included one female Latinx EL and one male Latinx EL, who is deaf in one ear. While this may seem a

relatively small proportion of Latinx students, we have focused on this IC group and this lesson because it stood out from our dataset as a particularly strong example of how Latinx students are racialized in these settings.

The group also included one White male who is in special education with a disability in reading. The last two participants are two White females. Of the five children, all received passing grades in English Language Arts and Reading on the most recent state standardized assessment (The 2016 Georgia Milestones test), except the student with a reading disability. It should be noted that the teacher facilitating this lesson is also a White female.

Findings

We will now address each of the primary findings of this study in order. First, we will explore the ways in which the White teacher positions herself physically during the lesson, creating a separation between the Latinx students and their primary peers. Second, we will discuss the ways in which the White teacher used her position to primarily call on and focus attention on one of the Latinx students, who we here call Lucia. Finally, we will unpack the language use of both teacher and students throughout the lesson, language use which both implies separation between the White students and Latinx students, reinforcing their implicit racialization and separation, while purposefully avoiding language which would necessitate the explicit recognition of race, whether in Thurgood Marshall's life or in this localized classroom setting in the contemporary U.S. South.

Teacher's Positioning of Self

From the beginning of the lesson, the teacher positions herself in a way that creates a physical divide, separating the children into two groups. The first group consists of three soft-spoken children, Lucia (a Latinx female), Josh (a White male with a learning disability), and

Rodrigo (a Latinx male who is deaf in one ear), who are sitting to her left. The other group consists of two White girls, who we here call Jenny and Peggy. During this IC the Latinx male Rodrigo is the one assigned to writing everything down, and when the teacher is not in the circle he is positioned in the middle, maintaining the divide between the two other groups. It is interesting to note that Josh, a White male with a learning disability, seemed to be grouped by the teacher with the other “minority” students throughout the IC. We did not have the opportunity at the time to ask the teacher why the students were grouped this way, and whether this grouping was a conscious choice. However, conscious or unconscious, the grouping did have racial overtones we will explore here in more detail.

Throughout the lesson, every time the teacher backs away from the group for a moment and re-enters, she positions herself in the exact same position, separating Josh, Lucia and Rodrigo from Jenny and Peggy. In addition, when the teacher is introducing and explaining the activity, her gaze is fixed entirely on Lucia, Josh and Rodrigo, as if she primarily feels the responsibility to explain the activity to them (with the implicit message that Jenny and Peggy, the two White female students, do not need the same level of scaffolding or assistance). This positioning of the teacher, while most likely done unconsciously, only further highlights and deepens the physical divide between Lucia, Josh and Rodrigo and the White girls Jenny and Peggy.

Calling Out Students

Throughout the lesson, the teacher calls on Lucia significantly more than any other student in the group. Specifically, she calls on her a total of 22 times throughout the IC, using language that is coded as encouragement for her to speak up and be included in the conversation. This behavior begins early in the session, before any of the children have much of a chance to

talk (and thus before the viewer/observer has a chance to note whether Lucia talks less than the rest of the children).

The first easily recognizable instance of this occurs one minute into the video, when the teacher poses a question to the group. After Rodrigo and Peggy answer, the teacher pivots her attention to Lucia and asks, “What do you think, Lucia? What do all those things have in common?” At this point in the lesson, only two of the five students have participated yet—making it all the more obvious that the teacher is singling out Lucia in her questioning. While this could understandably be to some degree based on the teacher’s observations of Lucia in past IC groups, in which she might have needed encouragement to participate, it is quite noticeable in this particular lesson that Lucia is called on individually almost exclusively relative to the other students.

About 10 minutes later, the teacher looks at Lucia and says, “I see you looking at some good stuff but I want you to be engaged here. Can you move this way a little.” Her choice of wording here implies that Lucia is not engaged, and engaged less than the other students who do not “need” such reminding and prompting. In calling out Lucia in this way, the teacher is putting the onus on Lucia to participate more. Never are the other students asked to include Lucia more—an omission that is particularly noticeable given the way in which the teacher has already separated and divided the students physically in the group (as mentioned earlier).

By repeatedly calling on Lucia in this way (again, 22 times in all over a twenty-minute video), the teacher calls negative attention to Lucia by magnifying what she perceives to be a lack of participation and engagement (while the language used is seemingly inclusive, the frequency of the language and the clear difference in attention placed on Lucia compared to other students gives the whole dynamic a negative connotation). This negative attention is

noticed by the other students, several of whom begin to call her out in a similarly negative and unencouraging way. For instance, about halfway through the discussion the teacher says (referring to Lucia) “She has good ideas in that head, I can tell,” to which Peggy replies matter-of-factly, “But she can’t pull one out.” This focus by Peggy on what Lucia is not doing, and the implication that she not only is not doing so, but *cannot* do so, reinforces a negative assumption about Lucia’s ability—ironically, providing a disincentive to participate, the opposite of what the teacher is likely trying to do. This lack of belief in Lucia’s ability is reinforced when Peggy says with surprise, after Lucia does make a comment, “Huh. She finally pulled one out.”

These types of comments, while potentially well-intentioned, only discursively reinforce the separation and divide between Lucia and the other students (which is already put in place by their physical spacing). By calling attention to Lucia and the idea that she is not engaged, unable to “pull one out,” her reasoning and speaking abilities are put in question. While the final comment by Peggy may seem positive, noting when she does perform in the way the teacher is expecting, the level of surprise undergirding the comment reminds the listener that Lucia’s abilities were in question in the first place.

Given that Lucia is an English Learner (EL), her English skills may play a part in her ability to express herself. Consequently, this may be why the teacher focuses on encouraging her to speak. However, with so much attention and what seems to be questioning of her abilities, the encouraging may be discouraging. Since Rodrigo, the other EL in the group has a leadership role assigned to him, it might seem as though he is more engaged. As the one who is writing everything down, everyone reports their ideas to Rodrigo. As a result, there does not seem to be as much teacher encouragement for Rodrigo to participate as there is for Lucia (and to a lesser extent, Josh). There may be personality differences at play here which slightly separate Lucia’s

and Rodrigo's approach in the IC, as Rodrigo seems to be more naturally outspoken. Although we did not gather this information, it would be interesting to know how Lucia's and Rodrigo's measured English language abilities compare to one another.

The teacher and Peggy may be questioning Lucia's abilities because she is not as gregarious as others in the group. In the book *Quiet*, Susan Cain speaks about the importance that schools and organizations place on group work as a society. Cain calls this phenomenon "The New Groupthink," in which workplaces are being set up in a way which promotes engagement with other students and schools are moving towards methods of "small group" or "cooperative learning" methods (Cain, 2013). Cain argues that the problem with the New Groupthink is that "The New Groupthink elevates teamwork above all else. It insists that creativity and intellectual achievement come from a gregarious place" (Cain, 2013). This is what seems to be happening in this IC—as Lucia does not seem to have a gregarious approach, the teacher and students may doubt her creativity and intellectual achievement. This, combined with the other ways in which Lucia and the other children are separated, as well as Lucia's EL status, reinforce our thesis that in the U.S. South, classroom dynamics are among those factors that serve to make schooling a potentially alienating and deficit-oriented experience for Latinx students.

Creation of Social Distance through Language

One particular question by the teacher led to a fascinating discussion, in which students' word choice revealed a very interesting sense of separation between different demographics of students within this small group. Specifically, the teacher asked how growing up during segregation affected Thurgood Marshall as an African American—on first glance a well-written higher order thinking question which could ideally lead students to self-reflection regarding their own relative levels of privilege and power. However, the teacher does not seem to anticipate or

mitigate the consequences of where the answers to this question might lead as following the example of their White teacher in their word choice, Peggy and Jenny make a clear demarcation between themselves and Latinx students Rodrigo and Lucia, while also seeming to try to universalize Thurgood Marshall's life experiences in a way that erases the particularity of the Black experience in the U.S.

This begins when the teacher makes the following statement: "...so that's what we're really focusing on today with Thurgood Marshall. So what you're going to do today guys is talk about what he believed in. Thurgood believed in equal rights for all Americans." This is an interesting way to frame Justice Marshall's legacy, as arguably his biggest achievements (such as the desegregation case of *Brown v. Board of Education*) were focused on the rights of particular marginalized minority groups, rather than all Americans as a whole. Along these lines, several students (Rodrigo and Lucia) respond by pointing out that being African American was a barrier that impacted Thurgood Marshall's life.

Interestingly, the teacher again reframes their statement to take away the particularity of Justice Marshall's experience as an African American and make his legacy more universal. In the teacher's words:

So what I was hearing is, you put that he – was an African American so he believed in equal rights for all Americans....because he was an African American during segregation he believed in equal rights for all Americans.

Is that correct?

Under a minute later, the teacher reiterates the same point again—that Thurgood Marshall fought for all Americans (with the implicit message being that he did not fight for only African Americans). Framing her statements in this way, and not recognizing or validating the response

of Rodrigo and Lucia, sends a clear message to the members of the group—that this teacher believes and wants to emphasize for her students the universality of Thurgood Marshall’s work, rather than the particularity of who was most benefited (in this case, Black and Latinx students who were sent to lower-quality segregated schools during Jim Crow).

This implicit message was clearly received by Peggy and Jenny, as they modeled and repeated this language throughout the rest of the discussion. Shortly after these statements by the teacher, Jenny states that “Maybe he joined the NAACP to do – to promote equal treatment of people, no matter what color.” Here we see the same sentiment—the speaker’s insistence and moving the conversation away from the Black experience when the content focuses directly on the Black experience. In the case of this statement, Jenny is asserting that Thurgood Marshall joined the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (or NAACP), an organization founded specifically for the purpose of redressing structural inequalities facing the Black community, for the purpose of helping all people, “no matter what color.” This insistence on viewing Thurgood Marshall’s experience through a supposedly colorblind lens, rather than one which recognized the inequalities facing the Black community, only heightens those injustices by erasing them. In the work of Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2010), there is the powerful theoretical construct of *color-blind racism*, which is defined in part by the “minimization of racism” or racial injustice in historical events and narratives for which race and racism are defining factors. This is precisely the act in which Jenny and others are engaging when they use wording that replaces the particularity of Black struggle with universal struggle—it is a form of racial erasure which exacerbates the painful experiences of Black America under Jim Crow by minimizing or forgetting it.

It is important to know that this framing is not only reinforced by the teacher, but by the curriculum. Slightly later in the conversation, Peggy points to an illustration being used during the IC of Thurgood Marshall, with the caption “Thurgood Marshall fought for the rights of all people in the United States,” and notes, “it says all.” This is important to note, as it reflects the fact that this form of color-blind racism is present not only in statements made by the teacher and the students, but in the curriculum as well, reflecting a wider pervasiveness of this type of thinking beyond this particular classroom or school.

It is interesting that near the end of the lesson, Rodrigo asks a clarifying question regarding who Thurgood Marshall was trying to help—specifically, he asks, “Is that for African Americans or Americans?” In response, Josh first says “African Americans,” but quickly after Peggy and Jenny in unison correct his answer by emphatically yelling, “All people.” Peggy in particular returns to this theme several more times, stating a minute later that “He believed in justice for all people,” and 30 seconds after, “Yes, all people.” The fact that several participants feel the need to continually reinforce this point only further supports the argument that this is a form of purposeful erasure—namely, focusing on the Black experience seems to make several White students uncomfortable, leading them to try to minimize that discomfort by repeatedly de-racializing the discussion.

Who is “Us?”

Given this repeated focus on Thurgood Marshall’s story being a universal one of struggle for the rights of all Americans, it is particularly interesting how several points in the discussion reveal that it is not always clear who is included in the term “American.” Lucia makes this clear when talking about where different racial groups would attend school during the Jim Crow period of segregation: “in his [Thurgood Marshall’s] childhood he could not go to the same

schools as Americans.” While the teacher corrects her quickly, stating that White Americans did not attend the same schools as African Americans, the assumptions guiding Lucia’s word choice are revealing—she did not register Thurgood Marshall, being a Black man living under Jim Crow, as “American.” Rather, in her conception, White citizens who were not segregated were the “Americans,” and Thurgood Marshall and other Black citizens were something different, something separate, much as the social and legal identities of Latinx people living in the U.S. are constructed as separate and different – with even citizens often being treated as “aliens” (Chavez, 2013).

Lucia’s response is one of several clear instances of the students’ aligning their linguistic behavior to reflect how they see their own positionalities relative to each other over the course of this conversation. In linguistics, aligning is the process of using language that reflects an affinity or commonality between certain speakers (Bissoonauth & Offord, 2001; Coupland, Coupland & Giles, 1991)—and thus, also illustrating non-alignment with those who are not shown such affinity. In this case, Lucia’s comments illustrate alignment of who classifies as an “American” and who does not.

This is made even more personal when the teacher asks students what would happen if segregation still existed today. Very quickly, Jenny points at Rodrigo and Lucia, and states matter-of-factly, “They would be gone.” Nodding and pointing in agreement, Peggy adds, “They wouldn’t go to our school.” Here, the aligning process is very explicit—even though Rodrigo and Lucia are Latinx and not Black (like Thurgood Marshall and the other segregated students in the lesson), Peggy and Jenny understand that these two other students do not fit in their conception of who would be allowed to attend their school. Perhaps even more interestingly, Rodrigo agrees with this assessment, adding quickly that “we [pointing at himself and Lucia]

would be like over here [pointing at one corner of the classroom] and you all three would be like, over here [pointing at a different corner].” In the next several minutes, Rodrigo repeats this point, nearly word for word, three more times for emphasis. In agreement, Peggy says several times in response, “Y’all [pointing at Lucia and Rodrigo] wouldn’t be here.” During one of these moments, Peggy accidentally points at Josh as well, who then gets a confused look on his face. Recognizing her error (as Josh, being White, wouldn’t have been segregated), she says sorry and corrects herself, returning to point at Lucia and Rodrigo.

This repeated pointing and stating “you wouldn’t be here,” coupled with agreeing language on the part of Rodrigo, draws clear lines of alignment within this conversation. Just as Lucia saw Black citizens as separate from White “Americans,” both White and Latinx students noted that the same separation would occur between themselves, drawing strong symbolic lines of separation between the two groups. This builds upon the thesis of Straubhaar and Portes (2017) that, given the historical Black-White racial divide in the U.S. South, Latinx children have tended to be coded similarly to Black students as “Other” in the racial taxonomy of White Southern children like Peggy and Jenny. The power differential and sense of ownership implicit in pronoun use are very important here, as well. As Peggy and Jenny choose to call their school “our school,” they reveal their own awareness of and subscription to these racial dynamics, identifying their space as one in which they would belong and Latinx students would not.

Conclusion

In the introduction to this article, we note that to this point there has been relatively little work exploring what the experience of Southern Latinx childhood looks like in schools (see Straubhaar & Portes, 2017). We argue that in order for teacher education institutions and professional development entities to begin the process of more adequately training Southern

schoolteachers to be culturally responsive to the particular needs and experiences of Latinx students, more research is needed on what the current Latinx schooling experience is in the U.S. South. This article is intended as a contribution to this small, yet growing conversation.

Drawing on data from a larger study of teaching and learning among teachers of Latinx schoolchildren in North Georgia, we see in this particular lesson that in spite of her intention to encourage and include Lucia, as expressed through her explicitly inviting her to contribute because she “has good ideas in that head,” the teacher effectively separates the students into two groups both by her physical positioning and her language. By situating herself between the trio of Lucia, Rodrigo and Josh, and the duo of Peggy and Jenny (and aligning herself with the two girls by facing the other three students) the teacher creates a physical separation, while her language use (and the language use she facilitates and allows between students in her group), creates strong symbolic boundaries between White and Latinx students, boundaries which both White and Latinx students reinforce themselves.

The “color-blind” texts and teacher language used here reify privilege and reinforce prevailing assumptions about belonging, entitlement and place without taking into account similar lived experiences that may currently be happening for Latinx students. The lesson analyzed in this study was a standards-based lesson about race and desegregation, dealing with “facts” of the Civil Rights movement in the 1950s and 1960s. However, the discussion among the children and teacher revealed how the vestiges of the Jim Crow era have contemporary implications for children of color, especially within the current Juan Crow sociopolitical climate for Latinx individuals in the New South.

Given the current sociopolitical climate for Latinx students, in Georgia and throughout the country, there are many parallels that could be drawn by teachers like the White teacher in

this particular lesson between the experiences of contemporary Latinx students and the experiences of African American students at the time of Thurgood Marshall. This classroom discussion on Thurgood Marshall was framed from the standpoint that he was fighting for the rights “of all Americans.” The White teacher’s response is understandable from the standpoint that her framing of the fight for desegregation is for the ostensible social good of “universal equality,” a framing likely based on the teacher’s own desire to avoid “uncomfortable” conversations. However, the White teacher’s (and by example the White students’) persistent insistence on leveling the racialized meaning of Thurgood Marshall’s work nevertheless served to erase and invalidate the Latinx students’ experience and did nothing to challenge White students’ assumptions about the “rightness” of their own privilege. As Straubhaar (2015) and Hyland (2005) have noted, regular interrogations of one’s own privileged positionality is an essential part of the praxis of any White educator working in communities of color.

Having uncomfortable conversations is particularly important in a post-Trump era, where the political rhetoric about Latinx people and the Spanish language coming from the President of the United States has triggered fear in many immigrant communities (Stavans, 2017). The New Latino South already had one of the most repressive legal systems towards undocumented immigrants before the recent presidential election in the form of Juan Crow. For Latinx children of immigrants in the current post-Trump K-12 system, increased fear of having a parent deported, or of being separated from one’s family, may drastically impact the ability of Latinx students to learn and focus in the classroom. We see here that the Southern Latinx school experience is an incredibly racialized one, and that the teacher is a significant contributor to these processes of racialization. As such, this article provides powerful proof of the role, whether positive or negative, that a teacher can play in facilitating or exacerbating racial segregation in

contemporary classrooms. We here argue that this creates a particularly urgent need for teacher training and professional development addressing classroom racialization and segregation, focusing on actions teachers can take to unpack and address these worrying trends that unfortunately extend far beyond the classroom. Specifically, we believe that culturally responsive and sustaining pedagogies (Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2014; Paris & Alim, 2017) that promote collaborative conversation, such as the IC, provide opportunities for students and teachers to wade into these waters and disturb the glassy surface that obscures the racial turbulence beneath. Collaborative and culturally responsive teaching opens space for all children to share themselves, to bring in their own “linguistic and cultural-historical repertoires” (Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 1995) and show how they are “holders and creators of knowledge” (Bernal, 2002). However, teachers must be given training and practice in listening to their students’ diverse experiences and addressing their own biases, so that through this self-reflective process, they might help their students challenge the “normalcy” of racialization.

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