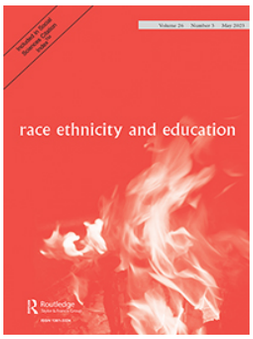

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Latina faculty developing a bilingual family studies class at a newly designated Hispanic serving institution: "these are safe spaces"

Diana Cedeño[a] and David Schwarzer[b]

[a]The School of Education, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, IL, USA; [b]Montclair State University, Montclair, NJ, USA

ABSTRACT

Given the growth of Latinx populations and the increasing significance of creating more inclusive higher education environments, it is vital to explore the importance of how Latinx bilingual faculty develop and teach transcultural content. The present research was a qualitative case study based on interviews with three Latina faculty at a newly designated Hispanic Service Institute University in the Northeast of the U.S. Via thematic analysis, findings revealed a range of processes related to creating safe spaces for both students and faculty, along with developing a class centered on the co-creation of knowledge. In particular, three Latina faculty described the challenges and opportunities of developing a bilingual and transcultural curriculum. This description may help other minoritized faculty members to propose new classes designed and delivered in a bilingual way to enhance the students' educational experiences in higher education. Implications for minoritized faculty developing similar curricula in higher education are addressed.

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Higher education; Latina faculty; minoritized students; women of color

Experiences of minoritized teachers (i.e. term that recognizes power relations by which certain groups are marginalized within a larger society, Chavira-Prado 2018) has been an area of interest in recent years, with debates developing in Europe (Bradbury, Tereshchenko, and Mills 2022), the U.S, and Canada (Finkelstein, Conley Valerie, and Schuster 2016). Recently, U.S universities have increased their efforts to recruit and retain more minoritized faculty, in particular women and persons of color (Finkelstein, Conley Valerie, and Schuster 2016). However, within U.S institutions of higher education, women of color make up just 10% of the faculty body (National Center for Education Statistics 2018), with Latina faculty making only 2% of the total. Although Latinx families are one of the fastest growing groups in the U.S, with a population increase from 16% to 18% in the last five years (Pew Research Center 2020), they remain the most excluded, with almost 30% of students dropping out of high school and only 10% completing a 4-year college degree (U.S. Department of Education 2019). The education experiences of Latinx students in the U.S. is one of accrued disadvantage, as many students experience racial battle fatigue (Call-Cummings and Martinez 2016) and often begin formal

CONTACT Diana Cedeño diana.cedeno@siu.edu

schooling without the socio-economic resources that many other students receive, where schools do not have the necessary funds to compensate for these disparities (Cedeño et al. 2020; Sarabia et al. 2021). Other challenges stem from the immigrant status of their parents, which along with their limited knowledge of the U.S. education system, contributes towards additional barriers for their success (Cherng and Halpin 2016).

Although some Latinx students face limited English proficiency and linguicism (i.e. structures used to legitimate and reproduce unequal division of power and resources between groups defined on the basis of language; Skutnabb-Kangas 2015), recent research has uncovered the interest Latinx students have to improve their proficiency and how it is connected with their educational goals. For instance, Eisenstein Ebsworth et al. (2022) found that Latinx adult learners were positively disposed toward bilingual learning programs and were influenced by a constellation of interacting variables that affected their language learning, including prior education, evaluation and placement, school culture, peer relationships, and teacher engagement. In this context, racial literacy (e.g. a skill and practice in which individuals are able to discuss the social construction of race; Stevenson 2014.) has a tremendous potential to be a tool which minoritized students can use to probe the existence of racism and examine the harmful effects of racial stereotypes.

Importantly, minoritized students may have more favorable perceptions of ethnic faculty, which in turn translates into positive academic outcomes and personal motivation (Redding 2019). Although research has suggested the positive link between ethnic faculty and positive learning outcomes, there are still gaps in the literature regarding experiences of Latinx faculty that develop bilingual courses within the context of higher education. Therefore, the goal of this study was to explore how three Latina faculty members developed and delivered a bilingual curriculum (Schwarzer and Mary Fuchs 2014) for an elective course within the context of an undergraduate family science program. This study amplifies the voices of an interdisciplinary subset of Latina women who continuously reframed their pedagogy (i.e. process of engaging in re-membering and re-imagining to shape the process of learning; Guajardo et al. 2019) by developing and teaching a Bilingual Family Studies Class (BFSC) at a mid-level newly designated Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) University in the New York metropolitan area. Understanding experiences of Latina faculty is important because both minoritized bilingual students and faculty need spaces that are culturally responsive, where faculty of color and students can develop mutual reciprocal learning relationships (Cherng and Halpin 2016). This research is guided by liberation pedagogy view (Freire 1994), which emphasizes the role of structural inequalities in the lives of minoritized students and stresses the need to decolonize academia by way of unlearning, a process led by both students and teachers (Rodríguez 2018) within a bilingual context (Schwarzer and Mary Fuchs 2014).

Literature review

Recent discourses and social commentaries have begun to explore and reveal the depth and extent to which institutional racism pervades within higher education and its continual systematic disadvantaging of minoritized individuals. For instance, Arday (2022) explains that historically higher education within the UK has been situated

within a white Eurocentric context, which has often conflicted with egalitarian ideals associated with diversification and representation, in particular regarding Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) students. In addition, neoliberalism has created a corrosive environment for both educational institutions and their students, where profit-driven reforms that conform with the free-market ideology have been shown to influence school practices and changes how educators work with students (Costas Batlle 2019). Although there is a growing body of research on ethnic minority faculty in the U.S, it disproportionately represents the African-American experience (Croom 2017). However, minoritized faculty in general confront similar barriers in higher education, as they tend to experience prejudice, often find tenure criteria unclear, inappropriate and/or unrealistic (Azhar and DeLoach McCutcheon 2021), and are typically dissatisfied with the relative weights assigned to research, teaching, and service (Gándara and Escamilla 2017). Often, their research is devalued, particularly for being less rigorous and less academic than mainstream research (Croom 2017). Additionally, research has frequently demonstrated that student academic performance is influenced by teacher expectations (Wang, Rubie-Davies, and Meisse 2018), with gender and ethnicity being characteristics that influence student trajectories. In fact, research by Redding (2019) found that Black and Latinx students receive more favorable ratings of classroom behavior, score higher on standardized tests, and have more positive behavioral outcomes when assigned to a teacher of the same race/ethnicity.

Minoritized students in high school and college

As noted in the introduction, minoritized students face several challenges during high school and college, a main one being the enormous demographic divide between teachers and students. Currently, minoritized students comprise the largest demographic among public schools and make up a high percentage of urban school students in the U.S (National Center for Education Statistics 2022). However, according to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), in the 2017–18 school year, 79% of public-school teachers were white and non-Latinx (National Center for Education Statistics 2019). The reason why this demographic divide is so concerning is that minoritized students have more favorable perceptions of ethnic minority teachers, which in turn translates into positive behavioral outcomes, improved personal motivation, and better grades (Redding 2019).

In 2019, nearly 70% of doctorate recipients in the U.S were white, while Latinx students only made up 8%, along with 10% Asian, 7% Black, and 3% identified with more than one race (National Science Foundation 2020). In addition, the educational experiences and processes of many Latinx undergraduates are characterized by perceived psychological challenges, such as feelings of isolation, marginalization, (Gloria et al. 2017; Sánchez, Salazar, and Guerra 2020), and negative stereotypes related to ethnic identification (Ramos et al. 2021). These experiences are often linked to barriers accessing faculty or administrative positions after graduation (Sánchez, Salazar, and Guerra 2020), in particular for women of color (Hanasono et al. 2019). Despite these challenges, however, Latinx undergraduates find ways to successfully cope via pathways of spirituality and resilience (Gloria et al. 2017).

Challenges of minoritized faculty

Minoritized faculty face several challenges in higher education. First, those who have succeeded in academia often feel *tokenized* (e.g. feeling of being solely an element of diversification of faculty). They learn how to succeed in an institutional culture that is at many times unfamiliar to them, continuously searching avenues to claim their own 'voice' (Settles, Buchanan, and Dotson 2019). Second, researchers have noted that decisions and conditions surrounding minoritized faculty can be different from those experienced by majority faculty members, and these factors impact assigned workloads, research, tenure, and promotion. In particular, women of color tend to be more burdened with service activities (Gándara and Escamilla 2017). Third, minoritized faculty are assigned additional responsibilities because of their presumed knowledge of cultural differences, for instance, being called as the expert on issues of diversity, serving as the liaison between the organization and an ethnic community, or being called upon to translate official documents (Settles, Buchanan, and Dotson 2019). Few studies have explicitly addressed how minoritized faculty in higher education develop their own pedagogy, in particular when developing bilingual classes.

Latina faculty in higher education

In order to provide an interconnection with the situated experience of the Latinas in higher education and the concept of decolonization in academia, it is important to address the Latina experience, social locations, standpoints, and how they relate to current institutional practices in higher education. For instance, research and scholarship from ethnic minoritized women are often seen as tangential, less rigorous and academic, peripheral, and not published in the 'right' journals (Ford 2011). This lack of senior ethnic female faculty has been well documented in recent years, as trends show that women of color persistently earn less than their male counterparts, hold more part-time and non-tenure-earning jobs, are less likely to be tenured and have less clarity about promotion criteria (Azubuike et al. 2019). Additionally, women faculty spend more time on teaching and service and less time on research (Hanasono et al. 2019). Although much progress has been achieved, Latina women still lag socially, economically, politically, and educationally. According to the 2019 Almanac of Higher Education, minoritized women account for only 4.8% of the senior faculty and an abysmal 2.18% of the professoriate. A 2018 NCES survey of full-time faculty members noted the small percentages of Latina women active in colleges and universities. In terms of college ranking, only 3% of Latina faculty members held full professorships, and only 2% held associate status, the lowest percentages of all female ethnic minority faculty in these two ranks (National Center for Education Statistics 2018). Additionally, Medina and Luna (2000) explored the experiences of three Latina faculty members teaching in higher education institutions in the Southwest U.S. They found that participants encountered tokenism, fluctuating levels of support, and perceived burdens and expectations. Similarly, Reyes and Ríos (2005) focused on understanding the experiences and processes of Latina academics regarding their professional development and found that Latina faculty frame their experiences around their own family background, their relationships and responsibilities with graduate school, and interactions with students. Although these works are valuable, there is still an emphasis on male minoritized experiences (Lara and Fránquiz 2015) and not

much research has focused on Latina experiences in higher education, particularly while developing bilingual courses.

Recently, there has been some debate regarding safe spaces, what they are, and how to achieve them within educational contexts. Zeus and Porter (2010) suggest pedagogically reframing the term by promoting a 'risk' discourse, one which does not assume safety but a necessary contradiction and tension, while highlighting the importance of intellectual solidarity. In order to complicate our theory, in this paper we do not conceptualize spaces as constructed by those in the majority, rather, we argue that safe spaces in academia, those which stress a process of liberation (Freire 1994) and decolonization (Rodriguez 2018), should be constructed and developed by minoritized individuals, in other words, it must be organized and developed among those who are oppressed (Freire 1994).

Given the scarcity of Latina women with doctorates in the U.S, it is no surprise that the few who obtain doctorates and continue as faculty members in higher education confront feelings of alienation, have poor support systems, and live through personal and cultural conflict (Lara and Fránquiz 2015). These feelings appear to develop during early educational experiences and are reinforced in institutions of higher education. This is a qualitative case study (Merriam and Tisdell 2015) that focused on understanding the experiences of three Latina faculty in higher education in the context of developing and delivering a bilingual family science course. The guiding research question was: *What were the pedagogical experiences of three Latina faculty during the curriculum development and teaching processes of an undergraduate bilingual family science course in a newly designated HSI University the Northeast of the U.S?*

Theoretical framework

The present study applies the pedagogy of liberation proposed by Brazilian educator Freire (1994) and feminist decolonization (Rodríguez 2018) to explore the experiences of Latina faculty during the development of a bilingual family science course in an HSI. Freire (1994) liberation pedagogy is often considered within three main principles: the importance of developing a critical consciousness, the necessity of affirming the project of humanization, and the centrality and necessity of dialogue as the key tool for social change. These principles reject the banking concept embedded within neoliberal thought and instead adopts the view that teachers and students are conscious beings. In other words, education should be taken as a practice of freedom, where students and teachers develop their own human agency and are ' ... jointly responsible for a process in which all grow'. (Freire 1994, 61). In addition, the feminist decolonization lens of Rodríguez (2018) is based on processes of unlearning, which furthers our understanding of how liberation requires both a fundamental shift from colonizing ideologies of domination, along with the development of solidarity, in particular among minoritized women. Specifically, unlearning refers to processes that recognize the limitations and possibilities in academia with the goal of undoing the effects of institutional inequality. Combined, both Freire (1994) and Rodríguez (2018) guide our research and provided a more focused scope to reveal the pedagogical challenges and opportunities of Latina faculty within higher education spaces.

Methodology

Context

This is a qualitative case study (Merriam and Tisdell 2015) that focused on understanding the experiences of three Latina faculty in higher education in the context of developing and delivering a bilingual course. In the fall of 2017, following approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB), the bilingual family science course was posted in the university's selection system as being taught in Spanish and English, for students to know that the course was designed for bilingual students. During this initial process, advising was crucial, for example, by maintaining contact with the department advisor, who actively recruited students during advising sessions. Initially, the research focused on exploring experiences of bilingual Latinx students in a freshman level introductory family science class focused on Latinx Families in the U.S. The curriculum of the course was thematic in nature – it focused on central themes that were explored throughout the semester (i.e. demographics, immigration, ethnic identities, family relations, family roles, transnational families, etc.). Additionally, the curriculum of the family science course was based on the following pedagogical ideals: learning through discussion, teacher lead mini lessons, and student lead presentations of current events among others. Importantly, mixing languages and the development of a translingual ideology was encouraged. The initial research team was composed of five people, including the three Latina faculty, one adviser, and the data collector and first author of this study. The data collection of the initial research included two interviews with all sixteen participating students, sixteen in-class observations, reflective journaling, and two interviews with the three Latina faculty members, one at the beginning of the course and the other at the end.

Therefore, there were two populations interviewed: all consenting students participating in the class and the three Latina faculty members. This research is solely based on the interviews from the three Latina faculty and the reflective journaling developed by the first author. Regarding the three Latina faculty, one was the chair of the department and the other two were doctoral Teaching Assistants (see descriptions below). Our purpose was to understand their experiences during the development of the bilingual family science class, as well as their conclusions and thoughts once the class ended. Regarding positionality, the first author of this paper is Latina scholar with a transnational background and was the data collector of the original research that focused on experiences of Latinx students in higher education. The second author is an experienced Latino qualitative researcher and was a member of the original research team. Both backgrounds in qualitative research increased the potential for rapport during data collection (Merriam and Tisdell 2015). During data collection, a consistent reflection on positionality was developed, where the first author developed activities of reflective journaling before and after each interview with the three Latina faculty (Ortlipp 2008), which was related to establishing rapport, avoided misrepresentations, and aided in the establishment of honest and open interactions during interviews with participants. Regarding ethical issues, confidentiality was ensured via anonymity (use of pseudonyms) and by refraining from soliciting private information that was not closely related to our research question.

Participants

The participants of this study were three Latina faculty. All were teaching at the public institution of higher education where the study took place. The word Latina is used throughout this article only to inform the reader that the participating women are culturally rooted in Spanish-speaking countries and/or communities in the U.S. It is noted that each Latina woman in this study brings a unique, rich, and diverse worldview. Therefore, it is acknowledged that the use the term Latina fails to acknowledge the unique individual intersections in terms of socioeconomic status (SES), personal background, ancestry, prejudice, historical discrimination, and language differences, among other backgrounds. All names are pseudonyms.

Latina participants came from diverse backgrounds. Dr. Karina Sabino had previous experience working at other universities around the country before working at the institution at hand, and her transnational work focused on authentic community participation and social justice. Dr. Sabino identified as Jewish and Latina and grew up in South America, spending time between Chile and Venezuela, and Israel. She was 50-years old at the time of the study. The second teacher, Dr. Gia Zambrano, self-identified as Colombian and American. At the time of the study she was in her 4th year as a graduate student and had four years of teaching experience in higher education. Dr. Zambrano's research was focused on bilingual students in higher education. She described her background as working poor and was 52 years old at the time of this study. Finally, Dr. Valeria Martinez self identifies as Cuban, Puerto Rican, and American. Dr. Martinez was a PhD fellow when the course took place, with a research focus on minoritized youth and sense of community among Latinx adolescents. She grew up in the Northeast U.S., and considered her upbringing middle class, and was 28 years when the course took place.

Procedures

Two in-depth semi-structured interviews took place at the focal university. Each of the three participants was interviewed twice, for a total of six interviews. The first interview took place at the beginning of the class and the last interview at the end of the semester. The principal investigator of this paper was part of the initial research team and was in charge of data collection, transcription, and analysis, however, she did not make part of the sample. The PI met the interviewees in a private room on campus. The first and second interview with Dr. Sabino lasted 41 and 82 minutes, Dr. Zambrano's 46 and 75, and Dr. Martinez's 51 and 92 minutes, respectively. Participants were ensured they could end the interview at any time. Interviews followed a bilingual semi-structured protocol. The purpose of the original research from which this data emanated was to study the experiences of Latinx students in higher education, namely within the context of a bilingual family science course. However, the data collected from the instructors proved to be a rich source of data within itself, where important classroom and personal insights were gained after a rigorous process of thematic analysis.

Thematic analysis

A thematic analysis was used for the data analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006). The process was characterized by a dual process of inductive and deductive analysis (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane 2006). First, the team undertook an inductive approach which was data-driven, without immersion in prior literature. Rather, coders immersed themselves in the data autonomously and took memos on important sections (Braun and Clarke 2006). They then developed broad general codes from particularly salient discussions centering around pedagogical goals and personal objectives. Coders compared inductive findings with this theoretical orientation (Braun and Clarke 2006). The coding team then used theory (i.e. liberation pedagogy) to guide a deductive analysis by identifying subsequent patterns within the data. This dual approach allowed coders to inductively identify themes from preliminary coding and then narrow themes deductively. At each step of the coding process, the research team met and reviewed examples of quotes by blindly placing them into the agreed upon themes to ensure the themes were cohesive. This served as a member checking activity (Creswell and Miller 2000). All interviews were conducted bilingually (Spanish/English); however, findings are translated to English. Methodological underpinnings included contextualizing the experiences of Latina faculty as reflective narratives embedded within pedagogical processes of liberation (Freire 1994) and decolonization via unlearning (Rodrigues, 2018).

Trustworthiness

The research team took steps to ensure the trustworthiness of the study. Specifically, the first author and a second coder, an adviser to the class and Latino faculty member, used analyst triangulation (i.e. triangulation that involves using more than one coder, or data analyst in the study; Denzin 1970) by coding separately, where a consensus was achieved regarding each emerging theme (Creswell and Miller 2000). Frequent meetings were pivotal to discuss comparisons of emergent data and to identify patterns, which ensured the consensus achieved, in particular regarding the detailed interpretation of the experiences of Latina teachers. When contradictions emerged, coders had conversations as to the logic behind their interpretations, referencing data, theory, and relevant research (Merriam and Tisdell 2015). Third, the coders maintained a written audit trail over the course of analysis, all taken during coding. They were referenced throughout analysis (Creswell and Miller 2000).

Findings

This study sought to better understand the experiences of Latina higher education faculty and their experiences developing and delivering a bilingual class in a newly designated HSI University in the Northeast of the U.S. Three themes were identified: *Developing Trust: 'These are safe spaces'*, focused on developing safe spaces for students and faculty, *Lack of Appropriate Resources and Co-Creation of Knowledge*, and *Pedagogical Challenges and Opportunities.*

Theme 1: developing trust: "these are safe spaces"

Participating faculty in this study explained the importance of creating a space whilst developing the bilingual family course and activities. They created a safe space both for students (Subtheme 1: Developing a safe space for students) and for themselves (Subtheme 2: Creating a critical safe space for teachers). Both themes were characterized by their pedagogical goal of developing a liberating way of teaching and learning, one that was often characterized by sharing historical insights, personal stories of resilience and challenges, and an optimism for the future of Latinx communities in the U.S.

Subtheme 1: developing safe spaces for students: "knowing that they feel safe"

Gia shared how important it was for her to develop a space where students felt they could share their own personal struggles, such as apprehension toward speaking Spanish in public. Since the class conceived as bilingual since its inception, it was essential to think about those students who had challenges with language. During our first interview, Gia shared:

> Really the goal is to open a space for students to feel comfortable talking this language [Spanish] . . . not all students in this class are born outside the U.S or have Spanish as a mother language, necessarily . . . but the idea is to give them the space and to honor their heritage and to tell them that this language that they have is really important, and that it will be good for their future, and that these are safe spaces.

This sentiment was echoed by the other faculty, who expressed the importance of creating spaces where Latinx students in higher education can talk and write in Spanish, often their mother language, and where they feel safe to make mistakes. Participants also stated that creating a safe space for students meant developing positive relationships with them, from a level that they could relate to their teachers, as Karina stated:

> I think that gave them the confidence not only to know that they can tell their story, but they achieve as much as they want. Because they had role models . . . having people that can relate to them. You went through the same things that I'm doing, and look where you are, and look what you have done, so that means I can do it too.

Here we can see how Karina expresses the importance of students having teachers that come from a similar ethnic and cultural background. This positive student-teacher relationship was echoed by Valeria, who stated that: 'More than anything, I think, they felt safe, it was a safe space, they could talk about anything, cry about anything'. It became evident that for this course, a prerequisite for developing a safe space for students was for teachers to be intentional about the free use of language(s) and their representation and role within the class in regard to their ethnic and cultural similarities with students. Such a relationship opened the door for students to be their authentic selves during the learning process, which was clear for Valeria, who stated: 'Knowing that they feel safe and that your story is my story, I think this created a beautiful space for them, where they were able to flourish and to talk about things they never talked about before'.

Subtheme 2: creating a critical safe space for teachers: "we shared our own stories"

The teachers interviewed for this study expressed the need for developing safe space for themselves in order to provide the students of the class an empowering experience. These

visualizations were explained in terms of personal achievements and how they related to the pedagogical relationships emerging in the class between themselves as teachers and students. Gia explained how the class was a liberating activity for her:

> I think for me a safe space for me meant that opportunity to talk about myself, tell my story, and don't be judged. And I think that is the message that we conveyed to the students. The fact that we were speaking the language and the fact that we were professionals in the field, that we had our own stories, and that we shared our own stories.

In this quote we can see how this class was an opportunity for personal exploration for Gia. Moreover, it was an opportunity to create and develop meaningful reciprocal relationships with students. This sentiment was shared by Karina, who also expressed the importance of exploring the idea of developing a safe space for themselves as Latina teachers, emphasizing the role of trust and respect. She stated that:

> Well, a safe space for me as a professor . . . is always upfront the respect. I want to respect the students that I have in front of me, no matter from where they're coming, and I want them to respect me for the knowledge and professionalism, and the person that is going to come and teach them. In terms of respect, it is probably the most important part, that we create things and understanding that the students are going to take it as a learning experience.

This quote exemplifies the role of respect as a necessary value for the development of a safe space for Latina faculty. However, developing such a space often requires exploring uncomfortable territories as a teacher. For instance, Valeria shared that:

> If I want to create a safe space, we need to create a place where . . . very difficult topics are put on the table. We need to talk about it, and we have had, for example, conversations about class in terms of their social economic class, socioeconomic status . . . and differences within Latinos, and also colorism. We talked about that too.

This is another quote that describes the journey of creating a safe space for Latina faculty, one that is not only cemented in mutual respect between student and teacher, but that also includes conversations and analysis about common challenges, such as structural inequality. Moreover, conversations about internal and personal challenges were also explored, such as discrimination and prejudice within the Latino community itself.

Theme 2: lack of appropriate resources and co-creation of knowledge: "it was a surprise for us"

The second major theme found in this study was centered on the challenges of developing a family science bilingual curriculum focused on Latinx families in the U.S, in particular regarding the lack of references in Spanish (e.g. texts in Spanish related to Latinx families in the U.S). Although a challenge, the lack of non-English teaching materials is a common problem when providing content-based instruction in languages other than English. Karina expressed frustration, as she shared: 'It was a surprise for us to realize that not much has been written in terms of Latino students in the context of the college experience'. Moreover, not being able to find appropriate bilingual materials for the class, in particular in Spanish, that described the transnational experiences of Latinx families in the U.S was a barrier that faculty expressed as a difficult. Karina expressed this obstacle, regarding the lack of available readings and literature available:

> We are doing it for the first time and students are learning. However, some things bothered me, for example, having lectures … and not having the right materials, that bothers me immensely because we were looking for readings in Spanish, so we had to adjust.

This frustration was also expressed by Gia, who stated: 'I think as a starting class the lack of readings was a big challenge … we needed to support our outline and as a part of the curriculum … we needed references, things students could go back to and read and come back to us'. Moreover, often the challenge was not only the lack of materials, but the problematic quality of existing texts. For instance, Valeria shared:

> The articles that exists rely heavily on assimilation and acculturation issues and very negative perspectives around lack of performance. So, what we don't have is much information on the dynamics of the family, we don't have much information on the similarities and differences across the groups. Hell, we don't even have that much writing … there is some writing, but not like a clear sense of what is *Latinidad*, what is Latino? What is Latinx? All these conversations are still happening.

In particular regarding the discipline of family science within a U.S context, resources were scare and often outdated. While focusing attention on experiences of Latinx families in the U.S, Karina shared the frustration of reaching out to her colleagues and not finding much resources. She shared:

> We know that the concept of Latino families was created in the U.S, that is, the bibliography has been written in English. What has been written in Spanish is about families in Latin America … but … the relationships and circumstances of these types of families are not the same as those who live here.

Here we can understand the need for Latinx literature within family science, one that focuses on transnational experiences, typical of Latinx families in the U.S. Although all faculty agreed about the challenge of lack class materials; however, this challenge opened the pathway for the co-creation of knowledge. For instance, Valeria shared:

> As an academic I'm really tasked with bringing materials into the class, I'm supposed to use what's been published, and that's just one way of knowing. So, being able to teach bilingually, but also bilingually in my culture, you know, gave me the opportunity to discuss more than the one way of knowing.

This idea was shared by Gia, who stated that" You learn more because you are basing yourself on true experiences from students, they have lived it!" Despite these positive experiences of co-creation, Latina faculty still clearly expressed the challenges of not only the lack of materials, but also their discontent with the lack of institutional support. Gia expressed: 'What are we gonna do with them [the students]? How will we support them? With what we know now, where are we gonna go next? It is very hard … to do something continuously and validate the needs for that, and to bring the message that these classes are needed and that these students need a safe space'. Therefore, the dual pressures of absence of materials and lack of institutional support created additional barriers for Latina faculty.

Theme 3: pedagogical challenges and opportunities: "it's been a journey"

All participants in this study reported important insights related to their professional development contextualized as experiences of being Latina faculty in the U.S. Regarding student and faculty development during class, Gia expressed that: 'We come here as immigrants and we really focus on what we are doing to survive. But, we as a community, want to come up and reach the goals that we have'. In addition to the challenges of being an immigrant, Gia clarified the goal of the bilingual class: 'We really don't have the time to look around and see what is happening, often it is from work to school, and that is why we want to recognize this in this class, what is beyond'. Further, Valeria expressed that the class often challenged preconceived ideas and notions about ethnicity, creating the opportunity for students to explore new definitions of what it means to be Latinx in the U.S: 'Latino are not only a bunch of Hispanic or Spanish speaking people, it is much more than that'.

Participants also expressed pedagogical challenges related to the pressures of mentoring Latinx students, and developing together the meaning of being Latinx within higher education in the U.S. For instance, Valeria shared that: 'I felt pressure to perform as a Latina for them, but also pressure to teach them how to navigate the system successfully, and to be able to guide them through'. This quote explains the personal struggles that Latina faculty face in higher education, not only related to lack of materials but to feel the anxiety of mentoring other Latinx students toward success, a weight other professors do not have to consider. Participants also acknowledged that embarking on the journey of discovering diversity with students was possible through a curriculum that invited discussions on a range of topics, from differences and similarities between Latinx families to structural and historical forms of oppression. Such discussions proved a fruitful activity not only for students, but also for faculty. This theme was explained further by Valeria:

> I was impressed with how students are discussing their identity in class. Several students described epiphanies, like Sofia, when she said that she did not know that there were so many elements in being Latino, she said she thought it was only the food and the music, the students really didn't know about the differences between a Hispanic or Spanish person. It's been a journey for the whole class.

As reflected in this quote, the emergence of new ideas and the co-creation of knowledge by students and faculty about what it means to be Latinx in the U.S. proved to be an important milestone for Latina faculty. In particular, the use of two languages was often described in terms of empowerment for both students and teachers. As explained, Latina faculty developed a bilingual family science curriculum that focused on critical theory and personal reflections, which often provided the opportunity to discuss current topics within contexts of Latinx identity and cultural diversity. Valeria shared that: That's different, right? From teaching in single language courses . . . and yeah, I guess the single language course, the differences for me is the inability to pull from more than one way of knowing". Indeed, being bilingual and speaking *Spanglish* was not judged, on the contrary, both students and teachers felt comfortable to express themselves as they wished. Karina shared:

> The idea was to open a space for students, to feel comfortable talking this language [Spanish]. Not every student is born outside the U.S or have Spanish as their native tongue. But the idea was to, in class, give them the honor and tell them that this language that they have is important, and that it will be good for their future, and that this a *tranquilo* space, in which you will be more than a grade . . . they can use Spanish as they wish.

The above quote exemplifies the intentional analysis of each student as a unique individual, exploring where they come from and how they will develop their learning. In addition, there is a clear action of providing freedom of expression and representation to students, a situation only possible when faculty empower students to recognize their heritage in their native languages, and to recognize their authentic selves within the higher education context.

Discussion

The present study elucidates specific pedagogical challenges (i.e. lack of appropriate materials) and opportunities (i.e. creating safe spaces, co-creation experiences) during the development and teaching of an undergraduate bilingual family science course. Regarding the theorization of findings and noting that the success of minoritized faculty is influenced by a process of liberation, Freire suggests critical consciousness, the necessity of humanization, and the centrality of dialogue as the key tools for individual and social change. These principles were emulated and described by Latina faculty, as learning experiences were tied to critical thinking and open dialogue, often within a context of co-creation of knowledge. In addition, Rodríguez (2018) makes the case that *unlearning* is the soul and center decolonizing pedagogy, which is framed here as one of the necessary goals of liberation. Therefore, the data from this research study leaves us in the midst of several possibilities, recognizing the structural inequalities that have historically influence realities and norms in higher education that influences processes of liberation and decolonization, yet also acknowledging the important supportive structures developed among Latina faculty. The framing for decolonization of academia put forward by Rodríguez (2018) suggests that to move from oppression to inclusion requires a movement that is both inwardly focused on healing from the wounds created by structural inequality (e.g. unlearning) and outwardly focused on social change. She goes on to remind us that the U.S. education system has a long history of unequal socioeconomic opportunities and ethic hostilities and echoes Freire (1994) main idea contextualized within a feminist stance, which is that structural oppression harms limits the possibilities for a more equal society from a gender view.

The data from this research also indicated that the pathways for such a healing process starts with co-creating safe spaces for both students and teachers. Safe spaces can provide key tools that leads to paths of liberation (Freire 1994), not only for the development of critical consciousness and personal agency, but also as a space of dialogue, a key tool for social change.

Such safe spaces should be created and developed by minoritized faculty and should consist of mutual respect, being intentional with the nature of class content, and engaging in reciprocal learning relationships between students and faculty. Holley and Steiner (2005) found that students' perspectives of 'safe' and 'unsafe' in higher education

environments were related to what and how much they learned. The authors suggest that students who share safe spaces are more likely to learn about others, to expand their own views and preconceptions, to increase their self-awareness, and develop more effective communication skills. It is perhaps the feeling of being able to have a space where they can share their honest struggles which allows minoritized students to feel secure enough to take risks. All these themes seem to be a part of the experiences of the Latina faculty in this study.

Latina faculty also echoed the challenges regarding bilingual materials, as transforming educational spaces for minoritized students in social sciences disciplines in general, and family science in particular, cannot be achieved without the creation and dissemination of relevant materials (e.g. bilingual and Spanish written texts, readings focused on Latinx families in the U.S.) in higher education curricula. Such a goal should focus on materials that describe, from a strength and asset-based perspective, the historical contexts and development of Latinx families in the U.S., for instance, exploring such concepts as *familismo* (e.g. cultural value and protective factor for Latinx families that centers on family connectivity; Updegraff et al. 2012) within diverse Latinx families in the U.S. Additionally, such literature should include descriptions of what holds the family together, what means of communication are applied (e.g. translingualism, bilingualism), the role of transnationality (Cedeño et al. 2021), and definitions and examples of family integration, among other concepts. In such a process, is it important to consider the role of racial literacy (Colomer 2019) in order to explore how marginalized minoritized students and faculty make meaning of their own identities in order to reveal the tensions that arise when they attempt to define and express themselves in spaces outside of what they consider safe.

Part of this transformation depends on the recognition of linguicism (Skutnabb-Kangas 2015) within higher education contexts. Not only does the myth of linguistic homogeneity perpetuate an inaccurate understanding of Latinx college students, but such generalizations prevent educators from recognizing student differences and potentially alienates those who do not fit these paradigms. An explicit awareness of racism as a structural phenomenon, in particular when constructing linguistic diversity in the classroom, is the first step toward dismantling unjust language ideologies and other systems that drive not only the curriculum, but also pedagogical and assessment practices in higher education. As explained, the use of *Spanglish* allowed participants in this study to acknowledge the existing raciolinguistic ideologies in higher education, which aids in the development of safe spaces, where students and faculty can find liberation by dismantling traditional views on deficient linguistic practices by processes of unlearning (Rodrigues, 2018). Freire (1994) reminds us of the importance of acknowledging our own historical-cultural context, where praxis cannot be achieved without a deep reflection on systemic oppression. It is here that minoritized communities face the realities of neoliberalism (Baldridge 2019), which reinforces individual achievement and exceptionality while disregarding structural forces. For members of marginalized groups, a critical analysis of structural oppression leads to civic and political action. Hope, Keels, and Durkee (2016) notes that the involvement of Latinx students (and other minoritized communities) in diverse social and political movements is related to their political efficacy and higher rates of participation in modern social movements.

A commitment to understanding power and its relationship to interconnected structures of inequality in instructional contexts draws attention to the importance of policies, teaching practices, and instructional resources, in addition to the social practices reflected in how students and faculty treat one another. One strategy to meet the educational needs of Latinx students (who will be future faculty) is to hire faculty members who come from similar cultural and linguistic backgrounds, and therefore are more likely to understand the special needs of this minoritized student population. Bilingual – bicultural teachers possess cultural skills that can help these students mediate the two distinct sociocultural environments of home and school (Mottet 2019). They can use their language skills and cultural knowledge to support student learning and to serve as a liaison between school and community. Most important, their familiarity with the realities that students face living in socially excluded communities can give them crucial insight into many issues related to class, race, culture, and discrimination that affect these students and their families.

Implications

Increasingly tied to profit goals, higher education in countries like the U.K, Australia, and the U.S. points to a challenging future (Harper and Harrison 2020). Scholars have shown how neoliberal conditions such as drastic public funding cutbacks and increase in performativity measures have become hegemonic through ideological and governmental practices in higher education (see Mintz 2021). Minoritized faculty continue to struggle with the challenges in academia, where institutions are increasingly taking on a neoliberal agenda. Additionally, although higher education systems vary in each country, common challenges regarding minoritized faculty are long-standing, with problems such as severe underrepresentation, low attainment gaps (Mcduff et al. 2018), and the inability of institutions to translate, develop, and promote solution-driven transformative practices and policies that can be employed to recruit, retain, and promote minoritized women faculty in a more equitable manner. Although minoritized faculty that challenge the status quo often have a difficult time securing tenure, funding opportunities, and public acknowledgment for their work (Medina and Luna 2000), shifting pedagogies outside the dominant culture often opens the door for utilizing alternative knowledges (particularly from non-Western contexts), which can blend into the power structures that currently compose academia. Such stances can encourage ethnic minority academics in higher education to explore multiple modes of oppression in historical and contemporary contexts with students, which may provide the baseline for critical pedagogy (Freire 1994).

The performance of Latina faculty in higher education and of minoritized women in academia is greatly influenced by institutional pressures and societal beliefs, which are further developed and maintained by internal cultures of exclusion. As Shahjahan (2011) highlights, minoritized faculty who practice a liberating pedagogy have the potential to illuminate and reproduce redemptive ideas and challenging preconceived notions while exploring multiple modes of social and historic oppressions in the classroom. The healing reciprocal pedagogical relationships applied by Latinx faculty in this study were pivotal toward connecting with students and celebrating their heritage. In fact, such a relationship provided students the opportunity to freely express their feelings, ideas,

and experiences in a space where they felt safe. However, such educational undertakings need to go beyond this research study. These relationships of healing, acceptance, and recognition need to be aided with systematic analyses of the historic and socio-economic factors of inequality and disadvantage. In terms of transferability, our study has important international implications. We encourage institutions in different countries to not only focus on the inclusion of women of color faculty, but also on minoritized languages and how to include them within current higher education curriculums (e.g. Traditional Indigenous Languages (TILs) as well as new varieties of dialects, for instance, Aboriginal English spoken across Australia by indigenous people). Finally, as Vaughan (2011) notes, achieving liberation and decolonizing academia requires building consciousness and praxis among minoritized academics, which may help heal and not internalize and blame themselves for lack of confidence and/or feelings of social pressure. This study encourages vulnerable faculty to cultivate self-awareness and to critique and challenge the inequality present in academia via reciprocal and empowering relationships.

Conclusion

This research highlights that while Latina faculty in higher education are gaining more recognition and that facilities are becoming more diverse; many women of color are still confronting additional barriers in a workplace that often ignores their needs and collective voice. Latina women in higher education navigate realities and hierarchies that are often foreign to them, lacking proper mentorship and trading resistance and critical analyses within and about their institutions. It is, however, important to note that the data emanated from this study shows praxis in the form of problem solving, creating dual safe spaces, and developing a culturally sensitive curriculum for minoritized bilingual students. Future research is needed to continue our understanding of the complexities of the lived realities of bilingual Latina faculty and of minoritized women in higher education, as shaped by the history and oppression, an ideological and institutional terrain that must be changed through processes of dialogue, personal liberation, and institutional change.

Disclosure statement

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ORCID

Diana Cedeño http://orcid.org/0000-0002-1415-978X

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