

“I Always Had My Instrument”

The Story of Gabriella Ramires

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this instrumental case study is to better understand the academic, social and musical experiences of a Chicana music education student. Semi-structured interviews with a third-generation Chicana student at a Midwestern university explored her academic, social, and musical experiences that preceded her pursuit of an undergraduate music education degree. Due to the current level of academic and social success enjoyed by this student and her access to a wealth of social capital and successful academic models, she is presented as a critical case. Barriers to academic and social pursuits as well as resilience to these barriers related closely to aspects of identity navigation and social capital interaction in this student's experience. The role of music, music education, and specific music educators acted as crucial ingredients for her eventual success. Implications for music educators and researchers include a call for additional support and greater understanding of potentially marginalized student populations.

Keywords: American immigrant students, Chicana/o, identity navigation, Latina/o, social capital

Nearly 2,000 miles from Mexico, student musicians from a Midwestern university work meticulously on charts for the College of Music's Salsa Band. The fruits of their labor hang in the air of the cramped rehearsal space that resembles a walk-in closet more than a rehearsal hall. A Caucasian male trombone player in his young twenties takes charge of the rehearsal diligently moving the horn and rhythm sections through musical phrases, polishing style and laboring intently. The entire ensemble works hard, focusing their efforts through their instruments in service of the music, with one glaring exception.

One member of the ensemble sits comfortably; her feet resting on a discarded drum cover, waiting for the group to work through the challenging sections of music. Dressed in a casual outfit of black cotton pants and a black shirt accessorized by stylish grey boots and large silver and turquoise earrings, this student finally rises to participate when the piece begins again from the top. A drumstick playfully holds her straight black hair in place as she stands nonchalantly, her hands on her hips, and this young Chicana woman breathes life into the room. This young woman had been lightheartedly teasing the rhythm section and offering travel advice to a fellow musician moments earlier and now sings with a voice beyond her years, commanding the attention of all within earshot.

Her lack of apparent effort is no slight to her work ethic or musicianship. Instead, the music appears to arise naturally from within her body. If work has occurred prior to this rehearsal on her account, nothing resembling work remains in her efforts. When she opens her mouth to sing, it is not notes that come forth, but pure, unhampered culture. She appears comfortably bicultural, singing music relevant to her family background while simultaneously existing as a socially confident and culturally aware American college student. She is pretty with a personality to match, pleasantly and tenaciously commanding the room. Her name is Gabriella Ramires (pseudonym) and her story is far more complex, intriguing, and inspiring than most would assume at first glance.

This case study examines Gabriella's story of academic, social, and musical pursuits mainly as an adolescent. Her identity navigation, experiences with academic and social barriers, and resilience in spite of those barriers paint an intricate portrait containing valuable insights for music educators. Semi-structured interviews with this third-generation Chicana student explored the experiences that preceded Gabriella's pursuit of an undergraduate music education degree, and discussion offers timely and valuable implications for the field of music education.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

As generations of Mexican immigrants have settled in the United States, their descendants have established a distinct perspective of their own, many identifying with the ethnic label "Chicana/o" (American citizens of Mexican descent). Frequently assumed to be fully assimilated "Americans," late-generation Chicanas/os (third generation and later) often find themselves navigating conflicting identities of *immigrant*, *ethnic*, and *citizen* (Chavez-Reyes, 2010). The arguably false dichotomous debates surrounding assimilation theories (e.g., straight-line vs. segmented, assimilation vs. pluralism) notwithstanding, the processes of acculturation and ethnic retention inarguably exist as part of the Chicana/o experience (Gans, 1997). Those immigrant students with the ability and support necessary to participate in selective acculturation while simultaneously retaining meaningful components of their ethnic identity often experience the greatest success in American schools (Lee, 2007; Olneck, 2004).

For many Chicana/o students, identity navigation closely relates to their academic experience (Romo, 2004). In terms of educational trajectory and academic success, one of the strongest influences for immigrant students of any generation is that of social capital. Increased volumes of social capital magnify students' perceptions and/or actual opportunities for postsecondary education (González, 2003). Prado (2009) presents a framework for dividing the manner in which social capital affects academic pursuits into three types of support: *ideational support* (pro-education norms and values), *material support* (tangible assets), and *bridging support* (networking with an outside party connecting between types of support and the system of education). Viewing the experiences

of immigrant students within this framework could help educators and researchers better understand the role that educators play in immigrant students' identity navigation and academic pursuits.

Despite the "American" status of late-generation Chicana/o students, access to higher education and the economic middle class cannot be assumed. Academic ambivalence and educational neglect persist among Chicana/o students regardless of an assimilated or bicultural identity, American citizenship, and English language fluency (Chavez-Reyes, 2010). Experiences with racial discrimination may cause students to avoid the "unhyphenated" label of "American" and solely retain the "Mexican" or "Latina/o" identity (Golash-Boza, 2006). In an attempt to explain the academic inequity experienced by Chicana/o students, many schools choose to blame a "cultural mismatch," operating under the assumption that the retention of Mexican culture impedes the academic success of Chicana/o students (Chavez-Reyes, 2010). Some academically successful Chicana/o students share this stance, believing that their unsuccessful peers have allowed cultural limitations to impede their academic success (Buell, 2002).

Addressing the needs of the increasingly diverse population of American students calls for change in the field of music education. Considering the importance of music in adolescents' identities (Campbell, Connell, & Beegle, 2007; Hargreaves, North, & O'Neill, 2000), understanding the musical experiences of Chicana/o adolescents may allow for more nuanced perspectives and improved efficacy and equity in education. Abril (2009) argues for music teacher education programs that celebrate and value diversity as opposed to programs that disconnect music studied at the university from "other" musical worlds (Clements & Campbell, 2006). A diversified field of music educators may better serve underrepresented and marginalized students in music education; however, if "barriers to understanding diverse cultural groups are still existent in institutional cultures" (Grant, Hansman, Jackson, & Spencer, 1999, p. 16), work for meaningful change remains.

The impact of forces such as institutional discrimination (McWhirter, 1997) and ethnic identity (Greene, Way, & Pahl, 2006) calls for greater understanding of the experiences with and perceptions of academic barriers among populations of potentially marginalized students. Educators and researchers must also understand the resiliency with which some Chicana/o students have experienced academic success to better serve this student population. All student populations stand to benefit from educators and researchers gaining insight into their experiences, but understanding the experiences of marginalized populations requires additional effort and research. The experiences of a prominent minority of at-risk students such as Chicanas/os demand further understanding within every field of educational research. The scarcity of existing research relating to the Chicana/o student experience within the field of music education reveals a gap in need of understanding and inattentiveness to the diverse populations that music education can serve.

PURPOSE STATEMENT AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

With the intention of informing practice and policy, this research aims to better understand the academic, social, and musical experiences of a Chicana student. Through the method of an instrumental case study with critical case sampling, the specific research questions being asked are:

What are this student's experiences with academic and social barriers and resilience?

How has social capital affected this student's academic pursuits and identity navigation?

What have been the roles of music, music education, and specific music educators in this student's academic pursuits and identity navigation?

METHODOLOGY

Design

This qualitative research employs an instrumental case study design with critical-case sampling. The study is instrumental in that it aims to use Gabriella's story to understand and inform the broader issue (Stake, 1995, p. 3) of American immigrant students' experiences and music education's role in affecting these experiences. Considering Patton's (1990) description of critical-case sampling in which the argument can be made that "if it happens there, it will happen anywhere," and because her story "can make a point quite dramatically," (p. 174) Gabriella is presented as a critical case.

Before interviewing Gabriella, I operated under the assumption that she would not have experienced the kind of barriers to academic success and identity navigation described in other research on American immigrant students. I thought this for multiple reasons: Gabriella is a third-generation Chicana, she speaks fluent English (her first language), she has achieved enough academic success in a postsecondary degree program that sufficient economic and social capital to support this success was assumed, she clearly possesses a dazzling array of social skills and is comfortable among her American peer groups, and she is attending college in the same American city in which she was born and raised. Due to her access to impressive amounts of a variety of sources of social capital, if Gabriella *had* experienced substantial challenges in terms of identity navigation and academic pursuits, these challenges could be assumed to be experienced at an even greater level among immigrant students with access to fewer types and lesser amounts of capital.

As the sole interviewer in this study, I was connected to Gabriella through shared professional colleagues. After communicating via email with her we met at our first interview. I had known the other participant, Dr. Natalie Marshall (pseudonym), professionally for a few months at the time of this study. Semi-structured interviews served as the primary means for data collection, as well as fieldnotes and email communication. Interview questions were sent to participants prior to interviews and email communication.

tion preceded and followed each interview session. Initial interview questions centered on a basic telling of Gabriella's story and I followed up with additional questions during the interviews. Email communication prompted follow-up interviews with Gabriella for continued discussion and clarification. Total data collection occurred over the course of about six weeks.

Efforts for trustworthiness included member checks and peer reviews of codes and themes. Participants were sent complete transcriptions of interviews for member checks and communicated regularly via email throughout the coding and writing processes. While both participants were offered opportunities to give input and edit the transcriptions, neither participant chose to make noteworthy changes. Two music education graduate students completed peer reviews of codes and themes of the data and suggested minor changes that were negotiated and communicated with the participants.

Researcher's Lens and Theoretical Framework

In my years of public school teaching, I had the great privilege to serve a wide variety of American immigrant students in my classes. In particular, my most recent position involved a large number of first- and second-generation Chicana/o and Latina/o immigrant students in my classes in addition to a considerable number of mostly first-generation Asian immigrant students. The diversity of these students' experiences piqued my professional interest for years and played a strong motivating role in inspiring this research.

The greatest motivator for my interest in this research, however, comes from personal experience. When I was 23 years old, my parents adopted my youngest sister, a first-generation 16-year-old Chinese immigrant. My sister had moved to America as a 13-year-old and faced (and still faces) a barrage of barriers and a surplus of hardship in her life. Some of these struggles are consistent with the experiences of other first-generation immigrants, while many more are unique to her extraordinarily arduous experience. Her experience and the experience of my parents' adopting her have played a pivotal role in informing and inspiring my perspective on this topic.

In addition to my professional and personal experiences, my perspective in this research is informed by Prado's (2009) social capital framework of ideational, material, and bridging supports. This theoretical framework shapes the lens through which I interpreted and analyzed the data. I found Gabriella's story to contain varying degrees of each type of support, and the application of this framework offers valuable perspective to the discussion and implications that follow.

Participants

Gabriella Ramirez is a fourth-year music education major at a large Midwestern university. An American citizen, born in the same city in which she currently attends college to American citizen parents (themselves children of Mexican immigrants), Gabriella

would be labeled as a third generation immigrant. She self-identifies readily and consistently as a Chicana. English is her first language although she also speaks fluent Spanish, the first language of her parents. Economic issues did not emerge meaningfully from the data, but Gabriella described a life of relative middle-class comfort with both of her parents being fully employed (her father with a master's degree), and the family "never going without." Gabriella's major instrument is violin, an instrument she has been playing since the age of four. Descriptions of Gabriella's personality range from boisterous to vivacious, or gregarious to effervescent, and she has been told aptly that she is "no wallflower."

Dr. Natalie Marshall is an associate professor of music education at the Midwestern university that Gabriella attends and has known the Ramires family since before Gabriella's birth. As children and adolescents, Gabriella and her older siblings took Suzuki violin lessons from Dr. Marshall. Dr. Marshall has additional professional connections to Gabriella as a university professor and through teaching experiences at a community music school and local music festivals. Gabriella even used to babysit for Dr. Marshall's child when Gabriella was a teenager. Gabriella has described Dr. Marshall as a "second mother."

FINDINGS

Emergent themes from the data represent issues of *culture-related barriers*, *identity navigation*, and *resilience*. These themes manifest in a variety of ways, with *identity navigation* consistently overlapping examples of *barriers* and *resilience*.

Culture-Related Barriers and Identity Navigation

The previous description of an apparently successful and bicultural Gabriella singing in her university's salsa band shows only the surface level of an intriguing character. Gabriella begins her story playing the violin at the age of four. Joining her older brother and sister who had followed a similar musical path at the encouragement of their father, Gabriella took Suzuki violin lessons and performed with mariachi ensembles in a larger city a little over an hour from her home. This experience formed Gabriella's initial musical strengths and assumed identity as a Chicana youth. While frequent performances with a culturally relevant ensemble were positive for Gabriella's musical growth, she describes these experiences as also creating barriers for her engagement with her high school culture.

I used to resent my father a lot for being in mariachi because once I became in middle school and high school I would go to [the city] to work Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays because that's when, you know, gigs are. So I, like, didn't go to a couple homecomings, I wouldn't be able to go to football games, and that was difficult trying to be into crowds. . . . I wasn't cool and playing in a rock band, I was playing in a mariachi band which wasn't . . . it was difficult to communicate what

that was, why it was important to me, why it was important to my culture, and what not. So that was, high school was a difficult time for me trying to fit in. . . . I didn't do well in academic classes, 'cause I just didn't want to be there. I would skip school a lot.

Skipping classes created obvious problems for Gabriella academically, but she received support from peers in a group she refers to now as the "wrong crowd."

I started skipping a lot and I had friends that let me skip. These particular people, I had a boyfriend who would let me skip. . . . I would just be like, "I don't feel like going to this class today." It was easier once I had a car 'cause I could leave. And when I was young before that, I had boyfriends, and I had friends that had cars. Like I said, people that didn't care.

Skipping classes frequently was just one way in which Gabriella struggled as an adolescent. Socially, academically, musically, and in terms of identity navigation, Gabriella wrestled with perhaps the most common issue facing adolescents: a desire to belong. A difficult task for any adolescent, Gabriella's struggle to fit in was exacerbated by her cultural background.

So once we got to high school, it was like, "Pick your clique." And I didn't really fit with [the popular student] clique, and I didn't want to fit with the Chicano clique at all. And I always got along with different people, but I really didn't have a solid group, so it was easy for me to float and slip away.

Gabriella describes a desire to fit with the Chicana/o and Latina/o group of her peers, but came to an eventual rejection of this group.

The people that I wanted to hang out with were Chicanas also. They came from Chicano backgrounds, and I had things in common. I would go to like, the fiesta every year, those are kids I would see at the fiesta. . . . I became friends with other Chicano people, the Mexican kind of group, but it became very clear to me, very fast that that was not what I wanted to do. It was very stereotypical, kids doing drugs, partying, skipping class . . . which, like I said, I wasn't really on top of high school, but I always knew I was not destined to be pregnant at 14, have three kids by the time I'm 18 and not do anything.

As part of the rejection of the stereotypes surrounding her Chicana/o and Latina/o peers, Gabriella experienced a personal rejection of her own culture.

I kind of really repelled the whole Mex—I didn't want to speak Spanish anymore. I didn't wanna play Mariachi music. I used to dance folkloric dancing when I was younger, I didn't wanna dance anymore. It wasn't cool for me to play an instrument. I didn't like it. I didn't want to do it anymore. I wanted to be with my boyfriend. I wanted to be cool. I wanted to fit in. So, I kind of like, ignored the fact that I played. And the only time I was a musician was when I was inside the closed doors of an orchestra room.

Crossing cultural boundaries with peers presented additional challenges for Gabriella when Caucasian peers would visit her home.

I remember scaring the crap out of one girl one time in high school when she came home and it was tamal making season. My mom makes tamales for Christmas and the meat is a pig head. And I mean, like, I've grown up with there being pig heads in my refrigerator and there's literally a snout, and like, it's a pig's head, and she was mortified and was like—I could tell right there that she just felt like she didn't know me and like, "Who the hell has pig heads in their," you know, "What is this family doing?"

Resilience and Identity Navigation

Despite her identity struggles, Gabriella made use of her outgoing personality, her ability to advocate for herself, and her musical skills to thrive.

So, it was kind of difficult for me to stay in a friends group, but I somehow did. I think it's because . . . I'm very talkative, I'm a very personable person, I'm easy to get along with, and I never really took a lot of shit from people either. It was kind of very obvious that I wasn't going to let anyone mess with me. . . . The music I liked was not popular music, but I'm a musician so all I needed to do was hear a rap song once and [claps hands] I've got the melody in my head so I can sing the melody. You know, I can dance to it at school dances, I can move. So, musically that helped me obviously to fit in with pop culture. . . . It was funny because I was really only down to [listen to popular music] in front of other people. Once I got a car, in high school for example, all my CDs in my car were mariachi music, Tejano music, salsa music. . . . So, sometimes I wouldn't want to give people rides home 'cause it was like, "Ugh."

While she acted with ambivalence toward most of her academic endeavors, her experience playing music in the high school orchestra and earning the respect of her orchestra director remained important to Gabriella.

So, I was quick and she saw that so she kind of was really supportive of me from fifth grade. So I think by the time I got to high school I felt like I owed it to her, almost, to be what she knew I could be. And like I said, she gave me a lot of responsibility and that made me feel valued. And it also made me feel very good at what I did. . . . And she was very well respected; she had been there so long. So like, her opinion mattered and she had a high opinion of me. . . . I really wanted the respect of my orchestra director. I remember one time she pulled me aside and she said, "You are a great violinist, but you cut class too much. And that's just all there is to it." And she was always very good about telling me that I was a good violinist, and I kind of, up until that point thought that I could slip away or that I could get away with it. For her to say that was kind of like, "OK. You're somebody I really respect and thank you for saying that."

Gabriella credits her musical experiences with aiding her academic endeavors despite a questionable academic record.

And fortunately, I always had my instrument. Because if it was based on grades, and it was based on how I behaved in high school and in middle school, I would not be where I am. I'm very fortunate that I play the violin, and like I

said, I'm good and I'm musical, and I'm a good vocalist. And I can understand that really, ultimately is what saved me as far as becoming a part of that world, you could say.

Gabriella's first language is English and she speaks with no discernible accent. Her Spanish-language skills appear just as strong, which led her to excel in Spanish classes, the only place in school, outside of orchestra, where Gabriella felt successful. Although academically successful, Gabriella's Spanish class experience contained mixed emotions.

So then I kind of developed a tense relationship with my teacher, too, because it was, she was kind of, bless her heart, a little, you know, weary and she was kind of a bonehead . . . she didn't get it when I was like, "You know, I don't want to be put on . . ." and to her, it was like, "Why?" . . . It wasn't necessarily that it was a bad experience. I just . . . I was always the one who was supposed to know what to do. And it was like, every single time she'd call on me, you'd hear this, "Ugh." You know? Or, "Ugh, whatever." We'd get our exams back and she'd be like, "The only—there's only one person who got a 100 percent in the class." And everyone's like, "Oh, we already know it's Gabriella." You know? And that was . . . I mean, it should have been a positive experience, but that really suppressed my desire to be like, "Yeah. This is," you know, "This is how I am. I speak Spanish, and this is my culture." So, it just kind of put a little bit of a halt on that.

Despite the mixed emotions of succeeding in front of her peers in Spanish classes, Gabriella credits much of her ability to embrace her background to her involvement in a student group at her school called Raza Unida. Sponsored by a Spanish teacher at school, Gabriella acted as president of the organization later in her high school years. The group's intention was to serve an influx in the school's Latina/o and Chicana/o population, in need of a place to belong.

So we had created a support system. It was intended to create a support system for them, but I mean, obviously it did for me. . . . And so that helped me because it was something that was, like you know, I could put on my résumé. It wasn't just like, "I'm a Chicana and I'm proud of it." It was like, "I'm a Chicana and I've helped to create this organization. Not only have I helped, I'm the president, not only am I the president, but I do this . . ." And so it was kind of like that was boosting, to society, it was no longer just my pride, it was documentable. It was something I could put on a résumé and show to somebody and say, "Not only am I proud, but I acted on it."

This awareness of demonstrating her accomplishments as part of navigating the academic system demonstrates Gabriella's understanding of a system that many earlier generation immigrant students may lack. Participation in Raza Unida aided Gabriella's identity navigation and enhanced her perspective on the crowd of students with whom she no longer chose to associate.

So, a lot of [the wrong crowd] were fourth generation, I would say . . . didn't speak Spa—it was kind of like, a [snaps fingers], "We're proud to be Mexican just because that's cool that we're Mexican," kind of like the "I'm gonna put a big cross

tattoo on my arm, but then I'm gonna go and you know, throw water bottles at people." Just do stupid things that high school kids do, or go, you know, smoke weed, or go do bad things, but put on—it was kind of like a façade. And I kind of realized that I guess my whole realization was, "Do I want to be a part of this group that puts on a façade, or do I want to be the real thing and speak Spanish, and you know, be true to whatever my beliefs are, and play mariachi and be able to do something that can be directly tied to what my culture is, my heritage?"

Just as her Chicana identity evolved in high school, multiple factors motivated Gabriella to adjust her course in regards to her academic future. Social accountability, self-reliance, familial expectations, and knowledge of the academic system all played roles in Gabriella's eventual rededication to her academic future.

And [a former friend] was like, "Do you really think I wanna be friends with somebody that doesn't come to school, and is already ruining their life in high school?" And in a very adolescent, juvenile way, it was like, [whispers] "Oh, shit. She's right." You know, it's so true. And that was the point where everybody is looking for colleges and everyone's figuring out what they're gonna do. And I was kind of like . . . my grades weren't going to get me into any college. So I had to figure out what to do. I had to start rushing to figure out my options and then like, figure out what I actually wanted to do. . . . It's a realization you have to make yourself. You either do or don't want to succeed.

Dr. Natalie Marshall served as a major musical and personal influence in Gabriella's life. Having given violin lessons to Gabriella and her siblings as children, Dr. Marshall attests to the social factors impacting Gabriella's academic and musical success.

It's just easy to relate to her. And she's always been a helpful, supportive person. If she has a problem with you, she works it out with you. So, I think everybody has a lot of respect for her for that reason. And plus, I think it was, you know, she had a lot of musical modeling when she was a kid. From the womb. She told me that her dad always played mariachi music at home. And he was the one definitely who got them started in Suzuki. He was the one that really wanted them to have this. So, I think there was a lot of modeling for that and a lot of positive reinforcement.

Even during the portion of Gabriella's high school career where academic ambivalence manifested in cutting classes, Dr. Marshall notes that her lesson attendance remained consistent. Through all of this time, Dr. Marshall persistently encouraged Gabriella to consider a career as a music educator. Gabriella initially dismissed these suggestions, but as she became concerned with her academic future she came to accept Dr. Marshall's proposals.

GABRIELLA: "And Dr. Marshall actually convinced me, she kind of pushed me along the whole time in high school to consider a degree in music education."

DR. MARSHALL: "I kept saying to her, 'Don't you want to be a music teacher? Don't you want to be a music teacher?' And I would say, 'Just kidding, just kidding,' but I really wasn't."

Gabriella chose to audition for the College of Music at the Midwestern university located in the city where Gabriella lived, and where Dr. Marshall teaches. Well outside of the norm, Dr. Marshall offered to act as Gabriella's private teacher during her early years in the university if no other studio teacher would accept her. This possibly controversial arrangement proved unnecessary as a private studio teacher professed willingness to accept Gabriella into his violin studio. Acceptance to the university was another matter. As a result of Gabriella's earlier high school ambivalence, skipped classes, and some failing grades, her grade point average was insufficient for acceptance to the university. Thanks to advocating from Dr. Marshall and others, the university offered Gabriella the chance to attend the local community college for a semester and after demonstrating acceptable academic performance, she would be accepted to the university. Gabriella recalls this opportunity as a turning point.

And so that, kind of honestly, to be 100 percent honest was just like, [finger snap] "OK. Click." Like, this is what will happen if I can just . . . this is what happens. This is a direct result of the choices I made; so now I'm given this out and this is . . . I can do this. I know I can, so I may as well just do it. And, so, I did. I went to [the community college], got four-points in my classes and was admitted to [the Midwestern university] the second semester of my freshmen year and then started from there.

Now a fourth-year student in the music education program at the Midwestern university's college of music, Gabriella demonstrates self-acceptance and a comfortable bicultural identity. She plays and studies Western classical music, performs well academically in her music education coursework, and performs in the aforementioned university salsa band. Though the switch from mariachi to salsa was not automatic, Gabriella feels at home singing in Spanish and performing music she enjoyed as a child. One of her favorite pieces to sing with the salsa band is a song originally performed by Gloria Estefan, called "*Mi Tierra*" (My Land or My Homeland). Gabriella describes her perspective on the meaning of the lyrics:

"[The lyrics] speak of the desire to return to one's native land and the influence her native land has had on her life here in the United States."

An excerpt of the lyrics and their approximate English translation demonstrate an importance of remaining connected to cultural roots, a concept that has become important for Gabriella.

Mi Tierra

La tierra te duele, la tierra te da
en medio del alma cuando tú no estás.

La tierra te empuja de raíz y cal.
La tierra suspira si no te ve más.

My Homeland

The land hurts you, the land hits you
in the middle of the soul when you are
not there.

The land draws you the root and lime.
The land longs if you do not see it more.

La tierra donde naciste no la
 puedes olvidar
 porque tiene tus raíces
 y lo que dejas atrás.
 La tierra te duele, la tierra te da
 en medio del alma cuando tú no estás.

The land of your birth you cannot forget
 because you have your roots
 and what you leave behind.
 The land hurts you, the land hits you
 in the middle of the soul when you
 are not there.

DISCUSSION

Gabriella's story, which demonstrates the delicate interplay between identity navigation and barriers and resilience in terms of academic and social pursuits, contains many valuable lessons for educators. I offer three major considerations as a result of this case study.

Immigrant students, regardless of generation, may require additional bridging support. Viewing this case through the social capital framework posited by Prado (2009) reveals the presence of ideational, material, and bridging supports. The ideational support (pro-education norms and values) of Gabriella's family presented through familial expectations and multiple models for postsecondary success among her parents and siblings. While academic ambivalence resulted in a period of academic struggles for Gabriella, missing out on postsecondary education did not appear as an option. Once Gabriella came to terms with cultural identity issues (aided by her participation in the Raza Unida student organization), she navigated the educational system successfully. Her cultural background became more than a point of pride, but something that could bolster academic pursuits. This understanding of the educational system may be missing for many students of earlier immigrant generations.

While the amount of material support (tangible assets) available to Gabriella is not exactly clear and was not assertively pursued in interviews, it can be argued that at a minimum Gabriella did not experience the same obstacles as students from poverty might. While she mentions multiple times that her family was "not rich," Gabriella describes that her parents would not allow the family to go without. She affirms the common notion that in retrospect the money that she earned playing in mariachi bands may have contributed to the family finances (Clark, 2005; Lum & Campbell, 2009), but the extent to which her musical performing was actually supporting the family was neither verified nor investigated. The fact that Gabriella was afforded the opportunity to take private music lessons from an early age had an enormous impact on her future experiences.

Perhaps the greatest impact that educators (and specifically music educators) played in Gabriella's experience was that of bridging support (networking with an outside party connecting between types of support and the system of education). The indirect and direct influence of Gabriella's high school orchestra director created accountability for school attendance and created a space in which Gabriella felt successful. This posi-

tive environment served as a place to belong, which could serve many students from minority or marginalized populations. Dr. Marshall's direct and persistent advocacy also played a major role in Gabriella's eventual academic success. Not only did her musical teaching impact Gabriella, but her consistent encouragement and knowledge of the academic system helped Gabriella navigate the process of gaining access to postsecondary education. Not all students are fortunate enough to have this kind of bridging support in their lives, or the familial support to gain access to this bridging support, and an absence of these positive relationships with educators can lead to American immigrant students' disenfranchisement with school music programs (Carlow, 2006). The clear impact of this kind of support on a third-generation Chicana makes a strong case for how important bridging support, and educators' roles in providing bridging support, would be to other immigrant students. Dr. Marshall describes how the music teacher's roles may act naturally as support for any adolescent student: "I've found that some kids who can't talk to their parents could talk to their violin teacher during that time and I think (Gabriella) was one of those kids."

Increased bridging support for students from marginalized populations could impact not only the experiences of students in secondary music programs, but could increase diversity among the population of music education majors at the postsecondary level. While secondary educators should not primarily be concerned with the training of future music educators, the intervention of a university professor on the academic and professional trajectory of this student paints an inspirational picture of the power of bridging support. Investigation of audition processes and acceptance procedures of postsecondary music education programs may reveal opportunities for improved bridging support for students from many marginalized populations, and may also reveal bias in favor of "official" Western classical musicianship over the musicianship relevant to many "other" groups of student musicians and potential music educators (Clements & Campbell, 2006).

Showing respect to minority students can be complicated. Respect for students can appear in a variety of ways, but care must be taken to consider the students' perspective of how this respect manifests. Despite excelling with course content, Gabriella experienced occasional embarrassment and some "suppression of desire" when she felt "put on the spot" in her Spanish classes. One assumes that this result was not the intention of the teacher, but it does offer a cautionary tale to putting students in an uneasy spotlight. The logical desire to broadcast student success (particularly students from minority or marginalized populations) must be tempered with a knowledge of how individual students will react to such attention. A teacher must also consider how the class environment may thwart a teacher's attempts to praise individual students.

Gabriella felt respected by her orchestra director when she pulled Gabriella aside to remind her of the importance of school attendance. "Pulling me aside, because she would call people out in the middle of orchestra and say, 'Where were you yesterday?' So, that was her respecting me to pull me aside and say that." This kind of respect shown

to a student played a pivotal role in earning Gabriella's respect. Educators cannot undervalue the role of respect in students' academic and social experiences.

In the music classroom, publicly calling out minority students to represent the "other" may be more harmful than helpful, especially if relationships of mutual understanding and respect have not been established. Regardless of their knowledge or experience with a topic, students may be ostracized by having their difference put on display. Conversely, embracing and representing one's ethnic identity can serve as a positive tool (Greene, et al., 2006) as it did for Gabriella with the Raza Unida group. Navigating this line with minority students could mean the difference between embarrassment and empowerment.

Assumptions about immigrant students can be inaccurate and dangerous. My initial assumptions regarding Gabriella's experience turned out to be wholly inaccurate. I expected to hear a story of a student who had experienced success due to large amounts of a variety of capital and instead discovered a story fraught with a variety of barriers related to struggles with identity navigation. It would be understandable for an educator to fall under the same assumptions about immigrant students. In particular, a student such as Gabriella, who speaks unaccented English, displays a confident social nature, appears to have positive family support, and is outwardly so "American" that her last name's traditional "z" has been changed to an "s," is at a greater risk of being seen as assimilated to the point where she does not require intervention or assistance.

Although in many ways Gabriella would be considered an assimilated American, she chose to listen to mariachi, salsa, and Tejano music as a teenager. Music educators should take note of the fact that an American student may have unexpected and diverse cultural interests (Lum & Campbell, 2009). While "Mariachis have come to symbolize Mexican nationalism in the United States" (Clark, 2005, p. 227) for some Chicanas/os, Abril (2009) warns that "Mariachi is not necessarily representative of or relevant to people of Mexican or other Hispanic backgrounds" (p. 80). This consideration also applies in the experiences of Hmong immigrant students in the upper American Midwest. Lee's (2007) research showed that Hmong American immigrants identified strongly with American hip-hop music. Instead of identifying with the music of their cultural homeland, many of these students developed an oppositional identity that aligned with many of the African American adolescents in their community.

Educators, especially music educators who can easily fall into the trap of superficial multiculturalism, should not assume cultural relevance for their students. Students from minority backgrounds may be uninterested, unwilling, or unable to respond positively to teacher-selected repertoire and experiences based on inaccurate assumptions about their students. A potentially well-meaning music educator assuming that all of her Chicana/o and Latina/o students will identify positively, or even recognize mariachi music would be misguided. Music educators should place increased value on nuanced understanding of students' backgrounds and interests as opposed to assumptions based on cultural stereotypes.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

As the pluralistic population of America's schools continues to grow in diversity, the imperative to understand students' perspectives and experiences grows as well. The lack of published research on the immigrant student experience in music education demonstrates an unfortunately low level of attention paid to this portion of the student population. The story of Gabriella Ramires reveals the complexity that exists for even late-generation immigrant students. It can be assumed that these complications multiply for students of early immigrant generations, especially those living in poverty. Further research on immigrant student experiences at varying levels of socioeconomic status could shed light on the variety of barriers and actions of resilience that occur for these students. In addition to social, cultural, and economic issues, this further research might also investigate the existence of barriers to postsecondary music education programs including admission practices, curriculum, program structure, financial aid, and the practice of attending community college or other schools prior to university acceptance.

Additional research in the field of music education should also consider the experience of a variety of immigrant generations from a variety of cultural backgrounds. The experiences of all Latina/o immigrants cannot be assumed to be the same, nor can the experiences of American immigrants from other regions of the world. The substantial role that music played in this case raises questions about music's role in the experience of other immigrant students. Music may remain as one of the strongest links to immigrant students' cultural backgrounds, more than most school subjects such as mathematics, or English literature. If research in music education continues to ignore these populations of minority and marginalized students, the field risks suitably earning the criticism of serving only privileged populations, or attempting to homogenize a diverse population of students.

NOTE

This research was completed during doctoral study at Michigan State University in the fall of 2011.

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