

BAILA CONMIGO: REIMAGINING LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT THROUGH LATINA-CENTERED MENTORING

**Sonia Rodriguez
National University**

Abstract

Despite their growing presence in schools and universities, Latina educators remain underrepresented in educational leadership. Traditional leadership development often overlooks the cultural, relational, and identity-driven strengths Latinas bring to their roles. This article introduces the *Baila Conmigo* framework, a dance-based, culturally sustaining mentoring model designed to support Latina leaders through six interconnected stages: *Calentamiento* (warming up the identity and the story), *Ritmo* (discovering leadership rhythm), *Pareja & Rueda* (community and partnership), *Coreografía* (leadership planning), *Spotlight & Escenario* (visibility and advocacy), and *Celebración* (reflection and legacy). Grounded in lived experience, community cultural wealth, Mujerista thought, and activist scholarship, *Baila Conmigo* offers practical guidance for mentors, leadership programs, and school organizations seeking to foster representation, opportunity, and supportive leadership development. The framework provides a much needed tool for empowerment, connection, and leadership growth at a time when many Latina leaders continue to navigate isolation, underrepresentation, and challenges to advancement. By honoring ancestral wisdom and the collective strength of comunidad, *Baila Conmigo* reimagines leadership development as both a personal and communal journey. *Baila Conmigo* serves as an invitation for Latina leaders to lead with authenticity, purpose, and courage.

Keywords: Latina leadership, mentoring, leadership development, cultural wealth, educational leadership

Across PK–20 educational settings, Latina educators serve in vital roles as teachers, counselors, faculty, and administrators. However, despite their increasing presence, Latinas remain underrepresented in formal leadership positions. Traditional leadership and mentoring programs often emphasize technical skills while insufficiently addressing the cultural, relational, and identity-driven experiences that shape Latina leadership journeys.

In my work as a bilingual classroom teacher, school counselor, educational leader, professor, and mentor, I have witnessed the transformative impact of culturally affirming mentoring relationships. Latina leaders consistently describe leadership as deeply intertwined with family, community, culture, language, and collective responsibility, demonstrating that leadership development is inseparable from identity development.

Drawing from these insights and directly informed by my research, I developed *Baila Conmigo* as a novel framework for Latina leadership development. This model reimagines leadership mentoring through the metaphor of dance, a culturally resonant and relational practice that

embodies tradition, movement, rhythm, partnership, and growth. Latina leadership, much like dance, is not performed in isolation; rather, it is cultivated through guidance, coaching, observation, reflection, community, and spirit.

This practitioner article introduces the *Baila Conmigo* Latina mentoring framework and demonstrates how my research has contributed to its development and application. It offers guidance for educational leadership programs, universities, school districts, and professional organizations seeking to support Latina leaders. The framework provides a culturally responsive approach to mentoring that centers identity, community, voice, and legacy while presenting actionable strategies for effective Latina leadership development.

PROBLEM OF PRACTICE

Power often shapes social norms that constrain women's access to leadership roles, particularly in fields historically construed as masculine. In education, for example, White men have traditionally occupied the highest leadership positions in schools. The conventional vertical and patriarchal structure has consistently positioned White men at the top and minoritized groups, particularly women of color, at the margins of leadership (Brunner, 1999, 2000, 2002; Blount, 1996; Grogan, 1996, 2005; Tallerico, 2005). Although research increasingly demonstrates that women's leadership styles can advance equity and inclusion, women remain substantially underrepresented in the superintendency. More specifically, the superintendent role continues to be among the slowest PK–12 administrative positions to integrate women of color (Tallerico, 2002).

A particularly significant concern is the persistent underrepresentation of Latinas in educational leadership roles, especially superintendent positions. Although the Hispanic student population continues to grow rapidly, Latina superintendents remain markedly underrepresented. In Texas, as of 2018, there were only 14 Latina superintendents out of 1,144; in California, there were 17 out of 948 (Texas State Data Center, 2018; California Department of Education, 2018). Recent qualitative studies (Alvarez, 2025; De La Cruz, 2025; Espinoza, 2025; Castillo et al., 2021; Martinez, 2024) suggest that progress has been limited, underscoring the continued underrepresentation of Latinas in key decision-making roles.

This underrepresentation is especially consequential given the rapidly shifting demographic landscape of U.S. students. The 2020 U.S. Census indicates that Hispanic or Latino people comprise 18.7% of the U.S. population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021). In California and Texas, that proportion approaches 40%, making Hispanics the largest ethnic group in both states. Hispanic students also account for more than half of public-school enrollment in both states (California Department of Education, 2022; Texas Education Agency, 2022). As these demographic trends continue, the need for representative leadership becomes increasingly urgent. As Ortiz (2001, p. 58) notes, districts “benefit from leaders who are representative of their community's population.” Therefore, given the continued shortage of Latinas in superintendent roles, it is essential to examine and learn from the experiences of those who have reached this level of leadership. Their stories and insights can illuminate pathways and strategies for others who aspire to lead (Alvarez, 2025; Castillo et al., 2021; Espinoza, 2025).

When I began this research, I focused on Mexican American women. This focus reflected my identity and my family's Tejano heritage in Texas, where the Latinx population is predominantly Mexican and Tejano. For clarity, "Tejano" refers to people of Mexican descent whose families lived in Tejas, now Texas, before it became U.S. territory after the Texas Revolution and the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848. I use "Mexican American" to denote Americans of Mexican descent, distinguishing this group from broader terms such as "Latinx" or "Hispanic." While "Hispanic" generally refers to Spanish-speaking populations and "Latinx/Latino/Latina" includes communities from across Latin America, each subgroup brings distinct histories, cultures, and identities. Scholars have argued that many Latinx communities primarily identify with specific national or regional identities, such as Mexican, Cuban, or Puerto Rican; therefore, these distinctions should be clarified rather than obscured by broad labels.

As my work has evolved, so has my commitment to uplifting Latinas in leadership while honoring the specific cultural and historical perspectives rooted in my Tejana background. My research and my experience co-editing the *Baila Conmigo* series (*Baila Conmigo: Mentoring Latinas for Leadership* and *Baila Conmigo Dos: Mentoring Latina y Hispana Leaders in Higher Education*) inspired the development of a mentoring framework that is intentionally inclusive and deeply attentive to the richness and complexity of Latina identities.

Within the field of mentoring, educational leadership research consistently identifies mentorship as critical to leadership development and advancement. However, many existing mentoring models ground themselves in individualistic assumptions and often overlook the cultural assets that Latina leaders contribute. Latina educators are frequently expected to conform to dominant leadership norms, which can require them to suppress or minimize aspects of their cultural identity to be perceived as fitting within conventional leadership spaces.

Notably, much of the educational leadership and mentoring literature has been shaped by Western organizational traditions that privilege individual achievement, autonomy, and career advancement (Hofstede, 2001; Kram, 1985). Although these models have contributed substantially to leadership development, they often conceptualize mentoring as a dyadic relationship focused primarily on the professional growth of the individual. In contrast, Latina leadership traditions emphasize *familismo*, *comunidad*, reciprocity, and collective responsibility, viewing leadership as relational and deeply embedded within social and cultural networks (Bordas, 2013; Yosso, 2005). Rather than positioning leadership as an individual pursuit, the *Baila Conmigo* mentoring framework recognizes mentoring as a communal process through which cultural knowledge, identity, advocacy, and leadership are cultivated across generations. This culturally grounded orientation extends traditional mentoring models by centering the social, relational, and collective dimensions of Latina leadership development.

Many emerging Latina leaders I have spoken with describe feeling isolated, invisible, or uncertain about whether they belong in leadership spaces. Although these experiences are often described as "impostor syndrome"; I resist that framing because it locates the problem within the individual rather than within the organizational and systemic barriers that have historically excluded Latinas from positions of influence. The challenge is not a lack of capability, talent, or readiness; rather, it is the persistent absence of equitable opportunities, representation, and affirmation.

Access to influential sponsorship and leadership networks remains limited for many Latinas, creating additional barriers to advancement. Although mentoring programs exist within some educational organizations, few are intentionally designed with Latinas in mind or grounded in the cultural values, lived experiences, and strengths they bring to leadership. Too often, these programs overlook the rich community cultural wealth Latinas possess such as familial, aspirational, social, navigational, linguistic, and resistant forms of capital that serve as powerful assets for leadership development. We should not see Latina leaders as lacking in skills; instead, we should see and build on these strengths as important building blocks for leadership growth and advancement.

Thus, the central challenge is not a lack of talent or potential among Latinas. Rather, educational systems often lack mentoring structures that reflect and support the unique experiences, strengths, and aspirations of Latina leaders. Mentoring models must move beyond professional advancement alone by nurturing leadership identity, cultural pride, critical consciousness, and collective empowerment. In response to this gap, the *Baila Conmigo* framework was developed and is designed to help Latina leaders thrive, rather than merely persist, in educational leadership.

THE BAILA CONMIGO FRAMWORK

Baila Conmigo (Dance with Me) was conceptualized as a dance-based mentoring framework grounded in the belief that leadership development is embodied, relational, and culturally situated. Drawing upon the rich traditions of the quinceañera, the framework recognizes that the leadership journeys of Latinas are rarely solitary. Instead, they are enlivened and sustained by a network of comadres, mentors, family members, and community members who guide, encourage, and accompany them every step of the way.

Traditional leadership development models have largely emerged from Western organizational contexts that privilege individual achievement, autonomy, and personal advancement (Hofstede, 2001). These assumptions often contrast with the collectivist orientations reflected in many Latina/o/x communities, where leadership is understood through relationships, reciprocity, and community responsibility. At its core, the mentoring framework draws from Mujerista thought by centering the lived experiences, testimonios, and ancestral wisdom of Latinas. It resists individualistic and Eurocentric notions of leadership, instead affirming that growth emerges through comunidad, relational accountability, collective care, and the moral agency of Latinas as sources of theological and leadership knowledge (Isasi-Díaz, 2004). Within this framework, leadership development is not solely personal; it is embodied, relational, and rooted in culture. The *Baila Conmigo* concept is fundamentally informed by the Mujerista thought, which honors the lived experiences, testimonios, and ancestral wisdom of Latinas. This approach actively resists individualistic and Eurocentric paradigms of leadership, instead arguing that authentic growth flourishes within comunidad, sustained by relational accountability, collective care, and the moral agency of Latinas as central sources of both theological and leadership knowledge (Isasi-Díaz, 2004). Within this epistemological orientation, leadership development transcends individual achievement and focuses on community care, becoming an embodied, relational process deeply rooted in cultural context.

Anchored in *mujerista* scholarship, the *Baila Conmigo* mentoring framework conceptualizes leadership as an inherently culturally affirming, relational, and liberatory endeavor. Drawing upon Comas-Díaz's (2016) theorization of *mujerista* psychospirituality, the framework acknowledges that effective mentoring must encompass not only professional competencies, but also the cultivation of cultural identity, spirituality, collective healing, and resilience in response to systemic inequities. Similarly, Bryant-Davis and Comas-Díaz (2016) emphasize that *mujerista* psychology foregrounds the lived realities, cultural assets, and voices of Latinas as reservoirs of knowledge and empowerment. This scholarship provides a robust foundation for *Baila Conmigo*'s intentional use of storytelling, community engagement, and reciprocal mentoring as mechanisms to foster culturally responsive leadership.

The *Baila Conmigo* framework honors mentoring as a communal and spiritual practice, where Latinas are continually accompanied by *comadres*, elders, and community networks who collectively nurture leadership potential. Leadership is seen not as a solitary ascent but as a relational dance, sustained by guardianship, reciprocity, and the affirmation of cultural identity. This philosophy is deeply connected to the ancestral practices of dance as a source of energy, empowerment, and community among women.

For example, in pre-Columbian Maya civilization, ceremonial dance was central to spiritual and communal life. Through ritual movement and trance, Mayan women embodied their "wayob" or soul companions, bridging human and divine realms and drawing strength from ancestral connections (Houston, 2023; Maya Dance, n.d.). Dance represents an embodied form of relational leadership in which leadership and followership are co-constructed through trust, reciprocity, movement, and mutual responsiveness (Matzdorf & Sen, 2015).

Contextually, across cultures, dance has long served as an embodied practice through which communities preserve cultural knowledge, strengthen collective identity, and cultivate resilience (Ehrenreich, 2006; Hanna, 1987). Within Chicana and Latina traditions, dance extends beyond artistic expression to become a celebration of heritage, intergenerational connection, and cultural resistance. Whether expressed through *danza folklórica*, *matachines*, Aztec/Conchero dance, Tejano dance halls, or family celebrations such as *quinceañeras*, dance reinforces *comunidad*, affirms cultural identity, and creates spaces where women exercise agency, leadership, and belonging (Bordas, 2013; Delgado Bernal, 1998; Hurtado, 2003). It is this understanding of dance as a relational, cultural, and empowering practice that serves as the foundation for the *Baila Conmigo* mentoring framework.

This reverence for dance as a spiritual and communal force is echoed across the world. In the Balkan women's circle dances, for instance, movement becomes a shared language of healing, celebration, and empowerment, preserving cultural memory and fostering solidarity, even within patriarchal contexts (Gimbutas, 2019). Symbolizing the graceful progression of a dance, The *Baila Conmigo* framework unfolds through six interconnected stages that nurture leadership development, identity formation, and transformational growth. Yet, before stepping onto this vibrant leadership dance floor, it is essential to pause and embrace the wisdom drawn from both cultural heritage and lived experience, that will guide each movement.

BAILA CONSEJOS: WORDS OF WISDOM FOR LATINA LEADERS

Over time, I have examined how many Latina leaders draw strength from simple yet powerful *consejos*, or timeless words of wisdom that celebrate both cultural heritage and leadership potential. These *Baila Consejos* are more than guiding principles; as they function as affirmations and reminders that every Latina leader carries a unique rhythm, a story worth sharing, and a source of strength that should be recognized.

Each *consejo* aligns with a letter in “Baila” (“Dance”), underscoring that leadership, much like dance, is both a personal expression and a collective celebration:

- B — Believe in yourself. Trust that you belong at the table and in every room you enter. Your voice, your story, and your presence matter.
- A — Access your currency. Recognize the skills, knowledge, and relationships you already possess. Strengthen your currency by establishing interpersonal networks. These are the keys to opening doors not just for yourself, but for others who will follow.
- I — Incorporate your cultural wealth. Embrace and draw deeply from your heritage, your traditions, and your ancestors. Let your origins ground and elevate your vision as a leader.
- L — Listen to your “gut.” Trust your intuition and honor your lived experiences. True leadership means having the courage to believe in yourself, especially when the path forward is unclear.
- A — Accept change. Embrace transitions and new opportunities with resilience and hope. Leadership development means stepping into the unknown and opening new doors but remember you never dance alone.

These *consejos* are woven throughout every stage of the *Baila Conmigo* framework, infusing each step with empowerment, wisdom, values, and the lived realities of Latina leaders. By centering these affirmations, the model encourages Latinas to embrace both the challenges and triumphs of leadership with pride, dignity, agency, and a deep sense of unity. Therefore, these *Baila Consejos* provide the spirit and foundation for the mentoring journey. They are not merely words of encouragement but guiding principles that accompany Latina leaders as they navigate opportunities, challenges, and moments of transformation. The *Baila Conmigo* Mentoring Framework is based on *Mujerista* thought and shaped by the lived experiences of Latinas, and it unfolds through a series of interconnected stages. Like a dance, leadership development is not linear; it is dynamic, relational, and shaped by reflection, movement, and community. I offer these *Baila Consejos* as a heartfelt gift from my *corazón* (heart), words of encouragement, wisdom, and affirmation for every Latina leader preparing to step boldly onto the leadership dance floor. May they serve as a reminder that you carry within you the strength of your ancestors, the support of your *comunidad*, and the courage to lead with authenticity, purpose, and grace.

THE SIX STAGES OF THE BAILA CONMIGO MENTORING FRAMEWORK

The six stages that follow invite Latina leaders to honor their stories, embrace their cultural wealth, and step into leadership with confidence and authenticity.

Calentamiento: Warming Up the Soul

With these guiding words in mind, the mentoring process begins with the Calentamiento (warm-up), the first stage of the leadership dance. Just as dancers warm-up before performing, leaders must cultivate self-awareness by examining their identities and the experiences that have shaped them. This stage invites participants to explore personal identity, family histories and traditions, cultural norms and values, community influences, and personal testimonios. Another, aspect of the Calentamiento, is identity and the story. Mentors are a part of both and create supportive spaces for critical dialogue about origin stories, influential role models, and cultural strengths such as familismo (family), respeto (respect), perseverance, and service. Leaders are encouraged to craft identity statements that connect their personal journeys to their professional aspirations. Through Calentamiento, Latina leaders are reminded that their cultural identities are powerful assets and sources of resilience, wisdom, and inspiration for the leadership journey ahead.

Ritmo: Discovering Leadership Tempo

Every dancer has a rhythm, and every leader has a distinctive leadership style. During the Ritmo (rhythm) stage, participants examine their natural leadership tendencies and learn to embrace authentic approaches to leadership. Using dance metaphors rooted in Tejano and Latina traditions such as cumbia, salsa, bachata, merengue, Tejano two-step, conjunto polka, ranchera, and norteño waltz, participants discover how they engage with others, make decisions, and respond to challenges. In turn, these discussions focus on emotional intelligence, resilience, and self-awareness. It is important to note that rather than encouraging Latina leaders to imitate dominant leadership styles, the framework encourages them to identify and leverage their own cultural attributes and strengths. Participants learn that effective leadership does not require abandoning cultural identity or authenticity.

Pareja and Rueda: Mentoring Through Relationship and Community

At the heart of *Baila Conmigo* is the belief that leadership develops through relationships, reflecting the communal spirit of the quinceañera tradition. The *Pareja* (partner) and *Rueda* (circle) stages emphasize mentoring partnerships and collective learning communities rooted in *comadrazgo*. For example, participants engage in one-on-one mentoring relationships while also participating in peer mentoring circles. These circles create opportunities to exchange diverse perspectives, engage in collective problem-solving, share lived experiences, and transmit wisdom across generations. Therefore, an important feature of this stage is sponsorship. Participants are encouraged not only to mentor others but also to actively advocate for emerging Latina leaders by creating opportunities, making introductions, empowering others, and amplifying voices. Through this process, mentoring becomes a reciprocal practice that benefits both mentors and mentees.

Coreografía: Designing the Leadership Journey

The fourth stage, Coreografía, turns vision into action as participants set leadership goals and create personalized plans that define clear pathways for growth. In this stage, mentors support participants in identifying leadership competencies, addressing barriers, and establishing milestones. Leadership development is viewed as choreography, an intentional sequence of steps that requires practice, adjustment, and persistence. Through this stage, participants develop action plans related to leadership roles, professional learning opportunities, networking goals,

and advocacy efforts. Progress is reviewed regularly, allowing leaders to reflect, revise, and continue moving forward.

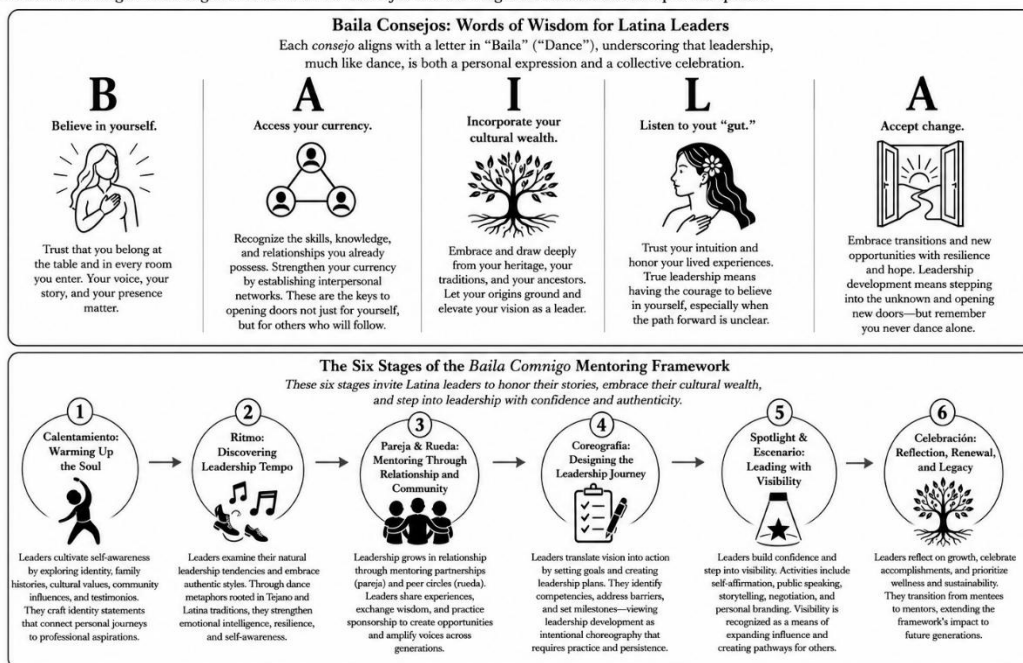
Spotlight and Escenario: Leading with Visibility

Many Latina leaders bring deep talent, knowledge, and expertise to their work, yet cultural and organizational influences can sometimes make visibility difficult. The Spotlight stage supports participants in moving beyond their comfort zones and entering leadership spaces with confidence and presence. Activities may include self-affirmation, public speaking practice, presentation development, storytelling, salary negotiation preparation, and personal branding. Participants learn strategies for advocating for themselves and their communities while maintaining authenticity and cultural grounding. This stage encourages Latina leaders to recognize that visibility is not self-promotion for its own sake; rather, it is a means of expanding influence and creating pathways for others. As participants embrace their leadership voice, they become better prepared to serve as advocates, change agents, and role models.

Celebración: Reflection, Renewal, and Legacy

The final stage, Celebración, recognizes that leadership development is ongoing. Participants reflect on their growth, celebrate accomplishments, and consider how they will support future leaders. In this stage, reflection activities encourage participants to examine how their leadership identities have evolved throughout the mentoring experience. Discussions also emphasize wellness, sustainability, and the importance of rest as a leadership practice. Most importantly, participants are invited to transition from mentees to mentors, extending the framework's impact to future generations. The dance continues as each leader contributes to a broader community of support and empowerment.

Figure 1.
The *Baila Conmigo* Mentoring Framework: *Baila Consejos* and Six Stages for Latina Leadership Development



Note. *Baila* (Dance) is an acronym representing core *consejos* that ground the framework in cultural values and leadership wisdom. The six stages are iterative and cyclical, reflecting the ongoing nature of leadership growth and community.

EVIDENCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACT

While the *Baila Connmigo* mentoring framework remains in the developmental phase, initial applications in mentoring, professional development, workshops, webinars, and leadership preparation have produced several promising outcomes. In the absence of formal evaluation data, practitioner testimonios and reflective perspectives provide valuable qualitative evidence regarding the framework's value for Latina leadership development.

Participants frequently report:

- Increased confidence in their leadership abilities
- Enhanced connection to cultural identity
- A stronger sense of belonging within leadership communities.

The framework's focus on shared live experiences, storytelling, and identity affirmation is frequently cited as empowering. As one Professor Emeritus described,

Baila Connmigo is cultural dance that enables us to take a peek at the complexities of navigating the labyrinth of educational leadership intertwined with culture, language, and ethnicity.

Moreover, *Baila Connmigo* has contributed to the development of sustained professional networks. Mentoring relationships and peer support systems often persist beyond the formal boundaries of programming, cultivating ongoing communities of practice. An Executive Director of an Educational Leadership Professional Organization reflected:

In the journeys of strength, solidarity, and Resistencia, shared here (*Baila Connmigo*), there is hope for Latina women, and those who identify as women, who are ready and eager to add their beautiful songs to ours.

Within leadership preparation programs, the framework provides a practical structure for integrating leadership theory with culturally responsive practice. Rather than positioning diversity and equity as discrete topics, *Baila Connmigo* embeds these principles across all stages of leadership development. As articulated by a Community College Chancellor,

Baila Connmigo highlights how mentoring remains one of the most critical tools in Latina educator success! It is sure to influence how you approach and understand educational leadership.

The framework is especially relevant for Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs) and organizations seeking to strengthen leadership pipelines for historically underrepresented groups. Given the growing demographic presence of Latina/o/x students, culturally grounded leadership development models are increasingly essential. A Director of Professional Leadership Programs with the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities commented:

Your work hits right at the center of what drives me. Also, this program isn't about me, so moving past my fan girl moment, you absolutely hit the target with your framework. They speak directly to what PK–12 leaders, especially Latinas, need to thrive.”

Collectively, these participant reflections serve as early indicators of the framework's potential impact. As implementation expands, ongoing collection and analysis of participant feedback will be critical for future evaluation and refinement of *Baila Conmigo* (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Yosso, 2005).

LESSONS LEARNED AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As indicated below, several lessons have emerged through the development of the framework.

1. First, identity matters. Leadership development is most effective when participants are encouraged to explore and affirm their cultural identities rather than suppress them.
2. Second, mentoring should be relational rather than transactional. Trust, vulnerability, and mutual learning create conditions that support meaningful growth.
3. Third, leadership development must be grounded in community. While individual mentoring is valuable, peer networks and shared learning opportunities strengthen its impact.
4. Fourth, visibility is a leadership skill. Many talented leaders require intentional support in developing confidence, voice, and advocacy strategies.
5. Finally, sustainability matters. Effective leadership development includes attention to wellness, reflection, and legacy.

Organizations interested in implementing *Baila Conmigo* should consider creating cohort-based mentoring experiences, leadership circles, facilitator training programs, and opportunities for participants to transition into mentoring roles.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

As the *Baila Conmigo* framework continues to evolve, the next stage is to finalize our co-edited book *Baila Conmigo Tres: Resisting Erasure Mentoring Latinx Activist Scholarship in the Academy*. This forthcoming work explores and supports activist scholarship and strategies for resisting erasure among traditionally marginalized groups within academic spaces and will provide additional relevant research for the framework.

Building on the established foundations, the subsequent project will involve co-authoring a practical “how-to” handbook and implementation guide. Designed for use in workshops, leadership programs, and school or community organizations, this resource will translate the core principles of *Baila Conmigo* into actionable steps, tools, and activities for practitioners and facilitators. The handbook aims to make the framework accessible for hands-on training, professional development, and ongoing program development.

The ongoing application of the *Baila Conmigo* mentoring framework in workshops and conference presentations will provide opportunities for constructive feedback, allowing the framework and its resources to be refined based on practitioner experience and participant outcomes. These efforts will further support the cultivation of culturally responsive leadership practices at multiple levels which include local, regional, national, and international.

While the *Baila Conmigo* concept remains unapologetically centered on the lived experiences, cultural knowledge, and leadership journeys of Latinas, the framework contains elements such as identity affirmation, relational mentoring, and community-building that may hold transferable value for mentoring initiatives in other disciplines or among other historically underrepresented groups (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Practitioners outside of education, or those working with diverse populations, may thoughtfully adapt select practices while respecting the cultural specificity and epistemological foundations of the original model.

Future research should investigate the impact of the *Baila Conmigo* concept across varied educational and professional contexts and explore how principles of the framework might inform or inspire culturally grounded mentoring in other fields, always with an emphasis on adaptation rather than generalization (Yosso, 2005). Through these next steps, *Baila Conmigo* seeks to advance leadership development that affirms identity, resists erasure, and centers Latina and Latinx voices, while offering insights that others may thoughtfully consider for their own communities.

CONCLUSION

The *Baila Conmigo* framework offers educational leaders a culturally grounded approach to Latina leadership development, honoring identity, community, and collective growth. *Baila Conmigo* was intentionally developed from Mujerista thought, which recognizes the lived experiences, testimonios, and cultural knowledge of Latinas as legitimate sources of theory and practice (Isasi-Díaz, 2004). Expanding the framework to encompass all marginalized populations would risk diminishing the very epistemological foundations from which it emerged.

Through six interconnected stages; Calentamiento, Ritmo, Pareja and Rueda, Coreografía, Spotlight, and Celebración, the framework supports leaders in developing confidence, voice, purpose, and legacy. As educational institutions continue to seek more inclusive approaches to leadership development, mentoring models that affirm culture, identity, and community become increasingly important. *Baila Conmigo* invites Latina leaders to step onto the leadership dance floor with courage, authenticity, and connection. More importantly, it reminds us that leadership is not a solo performance; it is a dance we learn, practice, and share together.

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