

Latinxs and Hispanics in Mathematical Sciences



Marta Civil

“To me, Hispanic Heritage Month is about all the Latinx families that I have worked with over the years. It is about their dedication to their children’s education, their love and respect for each other, their resilience and hard work, their enjoyment and laughter when they are doing mathematics together. It is about how much knowledge and expertise they have to contribute ... and it is not a month, it is always.”

Marta Civil grew up in Barcelona, Spain, where she obtained her undergraduate degree in mathematics from Universitat de Barcelona. She moved to the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign originally to pursue her interests in logic, but discovered the field of mathematics education when she became a teaching assistant for a mathematics content course for prospective elementary teachers. She obtained her Ph.D. in Mathematics Education and moved to Tucson, AZ, where she currently is a Professor of Mathematics Education and the Roy F. Graesser Endowed Chair in the Department of Mathematics at The University of Arizona. Her move to Tucson marked her professional career, as she became involved right away in projects working with schools in primarily Mexican-American neighborhoods. She has over 25 years of experience engaging teachers, children, and families in mathematics, primarily in working-class, Latinx communities. Her work focuses on cultural, social, and language aspects in the teaching and learning of mathematics, linking in-school and out-of-school mathematics, and parental engagement in mathematics.

She has led several externally funded initiatives that combine research and outreach aimed at developing culturally responsive learning environments. She usually teaches mathematics and mathematics education courses for preservice and practicing teachers and graduate courses on research in mathematics education. In 2013, she received the Iris M. Carl Equity and Leadership Award from TODOS: Mathematics for All, a professional organization that has as its mission to “advocate for equity and high quality mathematics education for all students—in particular, Latina/o students.” She was the Principal Investigator for NSF-funded CEMELA (Center for the Mathematics Education of Latinos/as), an interdisciplinary, multi-university consortium focused on research and practice on the connections between the teaching and learning of mathematics and the cultural, social, and linguistic contexts of Latina/o students.

Civil’s research seeks to bring together cognitive and sociocultural approaches with a focus on issues of equity in mathematics education. Her work combines an interest in teachers’ and students’ attitudes and understandings of mathematics (a cognitive view), with a well-established program of research that focuses on the experiences of families (mostly of Mexican origin) with mathematics in school and in out-of-school settings (a sociocultural view). Her research agenda is marked by an assets perspective of the communities with whom she works. Ultimately, Civil’s research is about turning language and cultural diversity into educational assets for the mathematics education of all students. Her focus is on developing in-school mathematics learning experiences that build on the participants’ active participation in their out-of-school experiences. Her projects with Mexican-American mothers emphasize learning from them and engaging in collaborations with them. She is particularly interested in immigrant parents’ views about the teaching and learning of mathematics. A key concept in Civil’s research is that of parents as intellectual resources for their children’s (and their own) mathematics education.

Lathisms was founded in 2016 in order to showcase the contributions of Latinx and Hispanic mathematicians during Hispanic Heritage Month, which is celebrated in the United States from September 15 and October 15 every year. During this time, we feature/reveal a prominent Latinx/Hispanic mathematician daily. See all the featured mathematical scientists at LATHISMS.ORG.

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