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Investigating the Student Experiences of Mexican-American PK-12 Educators to Cultivate Authentic Latino Recruitment Strategies

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This collective case study utilized a dual conceptual framework of Critical Race/Latino Critical Theory and Social Capital theory to examine the perceptions of PK-12 Latino educators (specifically, educators of Mexican-American descent) regarding their personal experiences as students in the PK-12 milieu, and how those perceptions impacted their consideration of education as a career. From the data, the following themes emerged: 1) *the Role of Relational Support*, with the subthemes of: a) Educators, b) Family, and c) Community; and 2) *the Role of Institutional Support*, with the subthemes of: a) Increased Student Expectations, b) Building Capacity, and c) Cultural and Socioeconomic Awareness and Validation. The implications of this inquiry could affect both K-12 institutions and higher education institutions as they analyze and subsequently modify or eliminate existing practices to infuse the support necessary to address the inverse growth of PK-12 Latino educators relative to the American population as a whole.

Keywords: teacher recruitment, critical race theory, Latino critical theory, social capital theory, additive schooling, authentic caring, relational resources, institutional support, Latino, Mexican-American, educational aspiration and persistence, majoritarian norms, racial nativism, stereotype threat, transformative leadership

During the 2010 Census, American citizens of Hispanic or Latino origin represented 16.7% of the population (USA Quick Facts, 2011). Between 2000 and 2010, the population of Latinos of Mexican origin increased by 54 percent, accounting for roughly 75 percent of the 15.2 million increase in the overall Latino population (Ennis, Rios-Vargas, & Albert, 2011). Moreover, the Latino population could rise by as much as 15 percent nationally to upwards of 31.3 percent in 2050 (Ortman & Guarneri, 2009). Gibson (2002) thus posited there is "a pressing need to recruit more Latinos into teaching so our teacher force is more reflective of the student population" (p. 247). However, this ideal is far from reality. Bracey and Molnar (2003) discovered that Latinos constitute fifteen percent of the student population, yet only four percent of the teaching population.

Ramirez (2009) presented this conundrum as a "professional epidemic which requires states, school districts, junior colleges, and all institutions where teacher credentials are recommended to take active measures to increase the number of ethnic minorities entering the teaching profession" (p. 19). Ladson-Billings (2005) further posited that teacher preparation programs "insist that prospective teachers demonstrate that they can be successful with a diverse group of students" (p. 231).

However, we often do not model this maxim in our own professional actions (Ladson-Billings, 2005), thus suggesting a disconcerting disconnect between the idealism of multiculturalism preached in teacher education programs and the reality of the schools they support. Howard (2003) noted that, "at the current rate, many students stand a good chance of completing 12 years of schooling and never coming into contact with a teacher of color..." (p. 150). Although Howard's definition of "a teacher of color" dealt exclusively with African-American subjects, its roots in Critical Race Theory apply nonetheless to all marginalized populations, regardless of their race or ethnicity.

Due to the growing need to bolster the ranks of Latino educators, this paper intends to discover ways for PK-16 educational leaders to bolster the recruitment of Latino students (specifically, educators of Mexican-American descent) into the PK-12 education ranks by exploring any possible connections that may exist between consideration of education as a profession and perceptions of the profession based on personal experiences one had as a PK-12 student. The following research questions were thus elicited from the researchers' literature review to guide the present study:

1) What are the perceptions of PK-12 Latino educators of Mexican-American descent regarding their own experiences as students in the PK-12 milieu, and how might those perceptions have impeded or facilitated educational aspiration and persistence?
2) Do Latino educators of Mexican-American descent believe that their presence in PK-12 educational institutions can further mitigate negative perceptions of the efficacy and potential of Latino youth not only for themselves, but also for those of different races and ethnicities?
3) How can PK-16 educational leaders inform and implement transformational strategies to bolster future recruitment of Latino educators in general?

Conceptual Framework

The study was guided by three conceptual frameworks: critical race theory (CRT), Latino critical theory (LatCrit), and social capital theory (SCT). CRT was employed by the researchers to identify institutional structures, policies, and practices (Solorzano, Villalpando, & Oseguera, 2005) in PK-12 schools that encourage or discourage Latino students from recruitment into the education ranks, thus illustrating how entrenched majoritarian notions of color blindness and meritocracy inherently disadvantage minorities through racial inequality (Bell, 1992; Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1996; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Huber, Lopez, Malagon, Velez, & Solorzano, 2008; Solorzano et al., 2005).

A focus was placed on the unique positionality of educators of Mexican-American descent. Accordingly, the researcher aimed to mitigate some of the ambivalence that exists among LatCrit scholars about Latino group identity given the fluid nature of race and ethnicity encompassed within the "Latino" label (Trucios-Haynes, 2001). The LatCrit framework compels researchers to "investigate the ways in which the dominant culture defines a group…in order to suit its convenience" (Trucios-Haynes, 2001, p. 3).

Finally, SCT was used to explore means by which PK-16 educational leaders can empower potential Latino educators (specifically, educators of Mexican-American descent) to become agents of social change and social justice themselves (Stanton-Salazar, 2004). SCT emphasizes the importance of social ties, familial cultural capital (Yosso, 2005), and extrafamilial networks (Portes, 1998) with *institutional agents* across institutional domains (Stanton-Salazar, 1997) to generate valued resources (e.g., an education), thus allowing Latinos to mobilize and secure the *relational resources* and *institutional support* needed "to secure goods and forms of support that facilitate the accomplishment of goals" (Stanton-Salazar, 2004, p. 25). Consequently, Latinos can convert social capital gained from that institution into *instrumental action* that enables them to successfully "exercise greater control over their lives and their futures" (Stanton-Salazar, 1997, p. 10) and to manage "stressful borders and institutional barriers" (Stanton-Salazar, 1997, p. 26).

Methodology

The general design selected for the study was the collective case study approach (Creswell, 2007), which allowed the researchers to explore in-depth "how individuals experience and interact with their social world" (Merriam & Associates, 2002, p. 4) to develop meaning. Multiple cases (i.e., individual subjects) were selected from multiple sites to collect open-ended, emergent data (Creswell, 2003) by holistically capturing "multiple realities that are not easily quantifiable... in a natural setting" (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006, p. 72). The conceptual frameworks of CRT and LatCrit served as a conduit for the researchers to explore "how larger contextual factors [e.g., race/ethnicity, power, and oppression] affect the ways in which individuals construct reality" (Merriam & Associates, 2002, p. 4). Moreover, the conceptual framework of social capital theory addressed the exploration of power – "who has it, how it's negotiated, what structures in society reinforce the current distribution of power, and so on" (Merriam & Associates, 2002, p. 327).

Participants

The sampling design selected was purposeful sampling (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007) with specific subjects selected to "best help the researcher understand the problem and the research question" (Merriam, 1998, p. 185). The researchers first contacted the human resource offices of multiple school districts in a Midwestern

metropolitan area to solicit names of individuals who might fit the aforementioned criteria and be willing to participate in the study. Ultimately, six subjects with whom the researchers had no previous contact were selected from four sites to maximize variation (Merriam & Associates, 2002; Seidman, 2006). The researchers' logic behind this was that, "if there is some diversity in the nature of the sites selected or in participants interviewed, results can be applied to a greater range of situations by readers or consumers of the research" (Merriam & Associates, 2002, p. 29).

Two participants taught at the same urban elementary school, one at an urban middle school, one at an urban high school, one at a suburban high school, and one at a rural high school. Four were female, and two were male. All of the participants but one had taught ten years or fewer but one, who was on the verge of retirement. All were educated in the United States except the eldest subject, who was educated in Mexico until high school. Two were first-generation college graduates. Participants were common simply in that they fell under the Mexican-American subgroup; otherwise, there was rich variation in PK-12 experiences and personal backgrounds. The researchers intended to abate any concerns of bias by selecting interviewees "whose views reflect different, even contending, perspectives" (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 64).

Again, it should be noted that subgroups under the Latino umbrella were differentiated by focusing exclusively on educators of Mexican-American descent. As Garcia and Bayer (2005) conjectured, Latinos "are frequently lumped into one group, essentially ignoring the differences that may exist between the differing ethnic groups that comprise this larger group, As such, reported findings may yield misrepresentations and potential errors if separate subgroup analyses are not executed" (p. 529). Moreover, as Hernandez and Lopez (2004) noted, when acknowledging the "heterogeneity and the diverse experiences and distinctive histories of each Latino group in the United States," one will find "there are no 'cookie cutter' approaches to increase access and retention rates of the Latino community" (p. 54).

Observation Protocol

Before conducting each initial interview, the researchers spent all or part of a school day in a complete observer role (Creswell, 2003), studying each subject in his/her natural professional setting(s) and role(s). These observations served two purposes, as articulated by Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (1995): 1) they allowed the researchers to become familiar with the setting and to develop a working relationship and rapport with the subject, and 2) they allowed the researchers to share a "day in the life" with the subject and to document this experience in writing. Field notes were thus created in order to determine what each respective subject deemed to be significant in his or her collective experiences (Emerson et al., 1995). Through these field note descriptions, the researchers aspired to actively interpret and make sense of events that may not have necessarily been significant upon initial inspection, thus turning each observation "from a passing event, which exists only in its own moment of occurrence, into an account, which exists in its inscription and can be reconsulted" (Emerson et al., 1995, pp. 8-9).

Interview Protocol

Kohli (2009) posited that the use of a CRT/LatCrit methodology "must benefit the participants, and the communities they come from" (p. 238). Therefore, one-on-one interviews were utilized to generate *counterstories* or *narratives* (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001) from subjects that might yield significant information regarding their individual experiences (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006) as students in the PK-12 milieu.

Solorzano and Yosso (2009) defined storytelling as the "method of telling the stories of people whose experiences are not often told (i.e., those on the margins of society)" (p. 138). Within this paradigm, the use of *counterstories* can serve four theoretical, methodological, and pedagogical functions as delineated by Solorzano and Yosso (2001):

> 1) they can build community among those at the margins of society by putting a human and familiar face to educational theory and practice; 2) they can challenge the perceived wisdom of those at society's center by providing a context to understand and transform established belief systems; 3) they can open new windows into the reality of those at the margins of society by showing the possibilities beyond the ones they live and demonstrating that they are not alone in their position, and 4) they can teach others that by combining elements from both the story and the current reality, one can construct another world that is richer than either the story or the reality alone. (p. 475)

Through these functions, the goal was that the counterstories gleaned through these interviews might reveal ways in which subjects might have been oppressed or subjugated in the PK-12 milieu. When viewed through the conceptual framework of CRT/LatCrit, counterstories serve well as "a tool for exposing, analyzing, and challenging the majoritarian stories of racial privilege" in order to "shatter complacency, challenge the dominant discourse on race, and further the struggle for racial reform" (Solorzano & Yosso, 2009, p. 138).

The interview format consisted of a semi-structured interview protocol including main questions, probes, and follow-ups (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Merriam, 1998; Rubin & Rubin, 2005) designed to elicit open-ended responses with clarity and precision (Rubin & Rubin, 2005) and draw out additional insight from

subjects when possible. The main questions were the "scaffolding of the interview" (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 133), a limited number of questions prepared in advance to develop rapport with the subject (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007) and ensure comprehensive coverage of the research problem. Consequently, follow-up questions were important "for obtaining depth and detail, and… obtaining more nuanced answers" (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 136). Participants were then interviewed individually on one or two separate occasions at their respective buildings of employment in order to elicit relevant details for clarification of any vague assertions made by the subject (Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

Data Analysis Procedures

Kvale and Brinkman (2009) used a miner metaphor to address the epistemological considerations of data analysis, noting that "knowledge is understood as buried metal and the interviewer is a miner who unearths the valuable metal... By means of a variety of data-mining procedures, the researcher extracts the objective facts or the essential meanings" (p. 48). Researchers cannot view social phenomena holistically (Creswell, 2003) and inductively (Merriam, 1998) unless coding methods are utilized that reflect the research at hand with exhaustive, mutually exclusive categories (Merriam, 1998) that logically flow from the data collected.

After all field notes were completed and interviews were transcribed, coding methods were thus employed that could "capture the complex categories or phenomena" (Saldana, 2009, p. 47). Weiss (1994) noted that "some coding categories we bring to our studies before ever knowing what the interviews will produce... Others we bring with us as readiness to interpret respondents' comments in one way or another" (p. 155). Merriam (1998) referred to such classification schemes as etic, or previously created by the researcher. Although the researchers certainly had particular classification schemes or typologies in mind for analysis of the research, they specifically sought those of an emic nature - that is, those found in the culture of organizations (i.e., PK-12 educational institutions) themselves (Merriam, 1998). The researchers also openly sought out in vivo codes, labels that emerged from the exact words used by interview subjects (Creswell, 2007). Such semantics lend themselves to a much richer and thicker description of the data than would have occurred with preexisting coding labels.

Consequently, an open coding approach was employed using both inductive and iterative analysis (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006, Kvale & Brinkman, 2009; Seidman, 2006) allowing for patterns and themes to organically become emergent (Creswell, 2003; Merriam, 1998). Through the conceptual frameworks of CRT/LatCrit and social capital theory, the researchers simultaneously utilized values coding and narrative coding to analyze the data. Values coding, as delineated by Saldana (2009), encompasses the "application of codes onto qualitative data that reflect a participant's values, attitudes, and beliefs, represent his or her perspectives or worldview," and are suitable for studies "that explore cultural values and intrapersonal and interpersonal participant experiences and actions in case studies (pp. 89-90). Narrative coding, as delineated by Saldana (2009), is "appropriate for exploring intrapersonal and interpersonal participant experiences and actions to understand the human condition through story, which is justified in and of itself as a legitimate way of knowing" (p. 109). From these, several overarching themes, or "outcomes of coding, categorization, and analytic reflection" (Saldana, 2009, p. 139), were gleaned.

Findings

The overarching question guiding this qualitative inquiry was, "How might the PK-12 student experiences of successful PK-12 educators of Mexican-American descent (including the presence or lack thereof of Latino educators as role models) have impacted their educational aspiration and persistence and, eventually, their decision to opt for PK-12 education as their career of choice?" Using the data set, the following themes emerged: 1) the Role of Relational Support, with the subthemes of: a) Educators, b) Family, and c) Community; and 2) the Role of Institutional Support, with the subthemes of: a) Increased Student Expectations, b) Building Capacity, and c) Cultural and Socioeconomic Awareness and Validation. Consensus emerged among many of the participants that both negative and positive perceptions of their various experiences as PK-12 students (and now PK-12 educators) played a significant role in their educational aspiration and persistence, both during their student years and later as educators themselves. Regardless of the obstacles many participants encountered, however, one thing was for certain: the advancement of education beyond high school was never in doubt for any of these intrinsically-motivated individuals. Moreover, the desire to encourage similar aspiration and persistence in their students was an underlying constant that permeated the responses of each and every participant.

Research Question 1: *What are the perceptions of PK-12 Mexican-American educators of Latino descent regarding their own experiences as students in the PK-12 milieu, and how might those perceptions have impeded or facilitated educational aspiration and persistence?*

Olivia and Staudt (2003) asserted that Latino educators consider the social justice implications regarding access to knowledge for marginalized students that may have been overlooked in their own schooling. Each participant thus modeled Valenzuela's (1999) notion of additive schooling in their pedagogy, using practices that validated and celebrated Latino students' culture and language as a strength, not a deficit one must overcome to assimilate within majoritarian (Huber et al., 2008) norms. Moreover, each participant aspired to reduce stereotype

threat by: emphasizing optimistic educator-student relationships, challenge over remediation, valuing multiple perspectives, serving as role models, nonjudgmental responsiveness, and building self-efficacy in all of their students (Steele, 2009). Finally, each participant employed authentic caring - that is, practices which liberate and move students "toward realizing their humanity through self, familial, and community critical reflection" (Romero, 2009, p. 221). One participant captured the essence of said social justice pedagogy in the following quote:

> My students are the first thing I have in mind here… because they are individuals. They are going through what I went through. And they need the support, they need the patience, they need the help. And I'm trying to give them as much as I can.

Much like critical race researchers, each participant refused to remain silent in order to empower marginalized students "in a society determined to cling to established habits of repression" (Taylor, 2009, p. 12), regardless of their race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic means.

Research Question 2: *Do Latino educators of Mexican-American descent believe that their presence in PK-12 educational institutions can further mitigate negative perceptions of the efficacy and potential of Latino youth not only for themselves, but also for those of different races and ethnicities?*

Issues of cultural awareness and sensitivity proved to be of greater import to the majority of the participants than the race or ethnicity of an educator. Educator role models were cited of various races, ethnicities, and genders; irrespective of these factors, these participants cultivated relational support with their Latino students. These educators affirmed the assertion by Kohli (2009) that "school staff must be culturally sensitive in order to cultivate and nurture positive self-images of their students" (p. 245).

For instance, bilingual education, or at least the ability to speak Spanish within PK-12 institutions, generated oppressive actions towards many participants in their PK-12 student career that could easily be construed as overt discrimination through the repression of one's language. Although this may well have been the case in some of these situations, one subject suggested that the fear of the unknown generated by this language barrier was of greater import:

> As a child, it was somewhat oppressive as far as our ethnic background, because at that time we were not to speak Spanish. So it was kind of a repressed thing, you know... "Let's not speak Spanish..." It was kind of like, "Deny who you are..." And you know, that language is a big part of a young person... we were actually disciplined if we were heard in the playground speaking Spanish... I think it went back to the number of teachers that maybe did not speak Spanish and wanted to make sure they understood what was being said...

Another subject went to preschool in Mexico learning both English and Spanish, as his father would always talk to him in English while his mother and her family spoke to him in Spanish. Upon returning to the states to a Catholic school for Kindergarten, he encountered similar issues of oppression not only for himself, but also for his Spanish-speaking mother:

> In Kindergarten, I got in trouble several times... and the teacher (who was a nun...) pulled my mom aside and told her to stop speaking Spanish to me, because she thought I just didn't understand what she was saying. And it wasn't that... I just didn't care. I remember thinking that clearly. It was like, "No, I understand what she's saying, I just don't pay attention."... I think maybe she just honestly thought that I was lacking in my English skills. And that because my Mom was just speaking in Spanish to me... I think that's what that was. And maybe it was just her – this Nun's educational training, you know – I think she was just trying to encourage English being spoken at home. Which I can understand that as an educator now, but at the same time it came across as pretty rough.

Yet another participant cited several misunderstood "discipline" issues where fellow educators simply dismissed well-intentioned students as being disrespectful. Had these educators been able to identify with the cultural norms of these students, they might have considered the possibility that their actions might be quite the opposite:

> I have teachers here, upper-grade teachers that come to me, totally offended with the student and saying, "Can you please ask him to show some respect when I'm talking to him, because he's not even looking at me in the eye and he's just avoiding me. But then, this is a norm at home. We are not supposed to look in the eye because it's daring, it's disrespectful. And if they're not aware of what the culture is, how can be they be identified? How can they understand where the student is coming from? The behaviors? They're just making more angry, you know, the students... No. He was just ashamed...

Regardless of the deficit in cultural awareness - generational differences, language barriers, or cultural norms – significant consequences abound for such pedagogical myopia. Contempt for students will, in more cases than not, foment contempt for educators, and the

institution of education in return. Two participants spoke of themselves or others as being ashamed of their Latino identity during their middle and secondary years, years when these individuals started to notice they were "different." When looking back at his middle school years, one recalled the "embarrassment of when you're in a public place with your Mom, and she's speaking to you in Spanish..." This was merely a proverbial speed bump for the subject, as his ethnic pride grew with age. Another subject, however, cited two students who worked actively to repress their Latino background, as they were students in a building that was over 95% White. This subject recognized the need to mentor and support these two young men, regardless of the perceived resistance they put up:

> So what I do try, is to show, you know, that it's okay. My one student that I have... sometimes he kind of wants to deny his background... I don't know what's going through his mind. And so what I try and do is try and put my experiences and say, "This is where I came from," and show that it's okay. And I have his brother...I'll see him in the hallway, and when I say, "Hola" - because I say "Hola" to all, whether I've had them in class or not - he'll just completely ignore me. But if I say "Hello," he'll say "Hello." And it's almost like, you know, "I don't want to speak any Spanish," and yet their Mom doesn't know English... it's just that he doesn't want to show, "Hey, yes I am! I am of Mexican descent... This is who I am, and I am proud..."

These students were fortunate to have a Latino mentor to inculcate some degree of ethnic pride in them in a community that was virtually devoid of racial or ethnic diversity.

It is certainly copacetic for Latino students to know that they are different from their majority peers, so long as subordination is not what defines such differences. Perspective is not just a byproduct of one's education, but also of one's upbringing and unique cultural and ethnic folkways and mores. One subject spoke to the profound power Latino educators can have by inculcating a sense of ethnic pride in their students through their unique perspective towards a curriculum that is traditionally derived and taught from an Anglicized point of view:

> ...I think being from a different culture... anybody other than "you are American" – I think would have given the opportunity to bring out different perspectives of history. Because I talk to students about history and they're like, "Man I never knew that..." and I'm like, "Yeah, because it's not in your history books, because it's from the American perspective." And if you have that teacher, I think, they'll still teach the curriculum, but they can insert those little things. I think the other place where that might have been seen more would maybe be in an English class. From a literature perspective, maybe reading Latin American stories, short stories... because as teachers we work with what we know, and being of a different culture allows you to grab from different things.

As a Spanish teacher, another subject included studies and research of Latino artists in her curriculum not only because it was of interest to her, but also because it was timelier and more accessible for some students. Moreover, such studies allow all students, regardless of their race or ethnicity, to see successful Latinos in professional roles, leadership roles, and roles that one might consider as "heroic." The subject saw the imperative need for students to see people of all races and ethnicities in positions where their actions clearly had a profound impact on others:

> I think... what we do here at this school – but I know it's not like this at every school, especially in the suburbs where there are few Mexican-Americans – we make a point to study [Latinos]. Like, we have a hero every year, and it's - I think the hero's been a [Latino] a couple of times. We try to go, we do all...we did Buck O'Neil, Cesar Chavez... you know, we do Black History Month, but we also have a time where we study Mexican-Americans, and I think that's important to let them know, these people did this...

Clearly, the ability to see fellow Latinos in positions of power and success can serve volumes to motivate young Latinos to take the steps necessary to follow their proverbial footsteps. In turn, exposure to these role models can perhaps mitigate some of the "shame" some Latino youth may feel towards their heritage.

Research Question 3: *How can PK-16 educational leaders inform and implement transformational strategies to bolster future recruitment of Latino educators in general?*

The level of social justice and advocacy that emerged in the data analysis of the pedagogy of the collective cases confirmed an assertion from Gomez, Rodriguez, and Agosto (2008) made in the review of literature:

> Prospective teachers of color also may be more aware than their white counterparts of unjust schooling practices experienced by families of low income and people of color, may be more likely to hold dimensions of a social consciousness and to take responsibility for transforming schools and society, and be more aware of how institutions

> support the status quo of differentiated schooling outcomes, such as tracking. (p. 268)

Two of the participants in particular spoke of their ongoing struggle with "fighting a system that is not working." For example, one participant lauded the Teach for America program as an excellent alternative means of alluring highly qualified teachers (including Latinos) to schools with high poverty and minority populations. However, as he further espoused,

> After the two years, those people go because they realize that they are fighting a system that is not working…. They get some incredible training, and they come through the schools and more stuff is being thrown at them that had nothing to do with what they were doing to help.

The leaders in these institutions may not have been overtly aware of adversarial conditions that discounted the humanistic concerns that are paramount to educators with a high degree of social justice and advocacy. Nonetheless, such concerns cannot be ignored if one desires to recruit such individuals for future vacancies.

Finally, Nunez and Fernandez (2006) posited, "Outreach is critical to recruit the diverse population we support, including those who might not necessarily see themselves reflected in the teaching position or might not think they have the means to do it" (p. 51). Outreach does not necessarily connote a specific recruitment program, but a conscious effort by educational leaders to provide a reasonable level of relational and institutional support to their Latino students during the PK-12 years if those students are ever to consider education as a profession, not an institutional entity they must "fight" to secure the necessary support to succeed and thrive. This mentality of fighting the system, whether perceived or legitimate, was a factor for some participants regarding their decision to pursue education as a career.

Discussion of Findings

In tandem, the themes of the *Role of Relational* and *Institutional Support* paint a vivid picture for PK-16 educational leaders of the sociological impact they can have through the implementation of transformational strategies during the formative years to attract more Latino youth to PK-12 education. As delineated in the review of literature, Latinos have a unique conundrum. They must expand their social networks in a manner that can enable them to make the transition from high school to college while reconfiguring their existing relationships and social ties (Saunders & Serna, 2004) without alienating those in their family or community who may not share the same beliefs on the efficacy of a postsecondary education. One of the subjects, a first-generation college graduate who was educated in Mexico and immigrated to the United States as an adult, spoke on a intimate level regarding her struggles to this effect. In spite of the lack of support from her family, she took the initiative to learn English and attain certification in ELL in order to become an advocate for herself, her kids and, as a teacher, for the kids of other immigrant parents:

> I had a family - a mother that I needed to attend because she was sick, and a husband that was not feeling good about me leaving the home in the afternoon to go to school... And my mother was always, "You're crazy, you can't do that. You need to take care of your kids," you know... And it was very hard, because I remember my kids, my husband, and my relatives trying to say, "You are so...because you are wasting your best years. So and so is getting married this weekend, we have this other party, and you're always looking at those books Saturdays and Sundays... And everything was hard for me because I didn't have anybody to call and ask for help.

In a sense, the teachers and colleagues who persuaded the subject to go to college were her surrogate family, at least when it came to offering her the support necessary to persevere in her decade-long pursuit of a degree. Thus the first conclusion, as it relates to determining ways in which transformative PK-16 educational leaders can bolster the future recruitment of Latino students (specifically, those of Mexican-American descent), is a fundamentally simple one: relationships matter.

Relational support for the participants was ultimately predicated on one simple tenet: each participant had significant role models and mentors in their PK-12 student years that affirmed Latino "cultural values such as *familismo* (importance of family), *personalismo* (the preference for personal over impersonal relational styles), *conflanza* (trust), *respeto* (mutual respect), and *dignidad* (care for the dignity of each person)" (Gardella, Candales, & Ricardo-Rivera, 2005, p. 42). One participant, for example, recalled a teacher who instilled a service mentality in her students at a young age by clearly going above and beyond for her at-risk students. This mentality has continued to serve this participant well in her efforts as a Level 1 ELL teacher and mentor for students of her own who are desperately in need of support and stability:

> Well, I do remember this teacher in elementary school... I remember inviting us to her house to do a vegetable garden. And she would divide the garden and we were taking spots and planting different things. After she invited us the first time, she kept inviting more and more students. She took those students who were like mean or...not being so fortunate, I guess. Because, I didn't have my Mom and my Dad, I grew up with family members. And this other girl that I remember, Catalina, she didn't have a Mom

> either. She was growing up with Dad and all the relatives. So she used to take care of us, in a way that she would teach us things; in the kitchen, outside, and always talking and talking and talking and talking. And I feel like she helped me so much that... She used to teach us with caring. You know, when you take that inside and you want to really communicate to others, help others... she had that. So I guess that's why I decided [to become a teacher].

Moreover, effective leaders must employ the moral dialogue (Shields, 2004) – both internally and externally in their institution – that is paramount to acknowledging, validating, and adapting to the unique cultural perspective towards education that Latino students and educators bring to the table. By doing so, leaders are more likely to embrace the notion that "difference becomes not something to fear, or to avoid, but part of the rich fabric of human existence with which we interact on a daily basis" (Shields, 2004, p. 166). Ultimately, no student in the twenty-first century should have to have an experience similar to a particular participant during her elementary years:

> As a child, it was kind of oppressive as far as our ethnic background, because at that time we were not to speak Spanish. So it was kind of a repressed thing, you know... "Let's not speak Spanish..." It was kind of like, "Deny who you are..." And you know, that language is a big part of a young person... we were actually disciplined if we were heard in the playground speaking Spanish... I think it went back to the number of teachers that maybe did not speak Spanish and wanted to make sure they understood what was being said...

Conversely, the second conclusion suggests ways in which transformative PK-16 educational leaders can bolster the future recruitment of talented Latino students (specifically, those of Mexican-American descent). Institutional agents (Stanton-Salazar, 1997) must fully utilize not only their trained faculty and staff, but also the familial cultural capital (Yosso, 2005) and extrafamilial networks (Portes, 1998) available to them through both neighborhood families and the community at-large. If schools cannot develop effective partnerships with the communities they serve, perhaps the community needs to step up to create the relational rapport necessary to meet the needs of its changing student population. Another participant spoke to a specific example from her youth when her father rose to such an occasion:

> It wasn't until I was in fourth grade when there was a distinct switch in the community, and there was an influx of Hispanics that moved in, to the point that the school wasn't prepared for it. They didn't have… any form of help for the kids, because they just weren't prepared. It was literally within a summer. There were families that moved in all together, and there was this need, because these kids didn't know any English….

At the time, it appeared that the school in question did not have the cultural capital (Anderson, 1996; Enwefa, Enwefa, Banks, Jurden, & Buckley, 2002; Valenciana, Weisman, & Flores, 2006) needed to serve this growing population, nor did they acknowledge the wealth of cultural capital waiting to be tapped in the surrounding neighborhood. This participant's father recognized this problem early on and took action:

> And my dad was involved in the PTA at that point, and he started going in for an hour at a time, and helping the students. So he kind of started the English language learning stuff… as this parent helper… [the school] talked about how there was a need and he was the only one that could help. Like I said, the new people that were coming in… their parents were in the same position. They didn't know English, so they couldn't help. And those of us that had been in the district for at least five years, those parents could help, but there were only like four, so it was whoever could do it.

If educational leaders are to foster the institutional support necessary to promote an authentic commitment to educating an increasingly diverse population, they must ensure their espoused values are commensurate with the underlying beliefs of their institution (Schein, 1992) on both on an instrumental and symbolic level (Tierney, 1998) in order to foster a community of authentic caring (Romero, 2009) conducive to increased expectations for students, building capacity, and improved cultural and socioeconomic awareness and validation.

Ultimately, all of the institutional support in the world is for naught if the pool of talented Latino youth with the potential for excellence as PK-12 educators is shallow at best. PK-16 educational leaders (particularly those at the middle and secondary levels) have an ethical imperative to identify and duly scrutinize both tacit and explicit "policies that marginalize Latinas/os" in the educational milieu "by limiting, rather than moving forward, Latina/o educational and societal advancement" (Gonzalez & Portillos, 2007, p. 261). The counterstories of the participants revealed many examples of tacit or explicit institutional policies that fomented cultural deficiency (Rolon, 2002) or deficit thinking (Kohli, 2009) - namely, subtractive schooling through the invalidation of Latino culture and/or language (Valenzuela, 1999), underrepresentation in advanced courses, and overrepresentation in remedial courses (Gonzalez, Stoner, & Jovel, 2003). For example, the fear of the unknown that

many participants alluded to regarding the language barrier was also cited by one participant in a recollection from his youth of an instance when he was punished for what was perceived by the teacher to be a language barrier, but in fact was a learning disability that would not be properly diagnosed until decades later:

> I had a teacher in... second grade, who... I didn't understand what she was telling me. She goes, "Mmmmmm-mmm-mmm," and I go... I said "Yes?" She just hit me with a ruler on the hand... Cause I understood English; I don't know why I didn't understand her. She just hit me in the hand.

Furthermore, based on the counterstories that emerged, one might infer that many Latino youth with the potential for excellence as Latino educators may never realize that potential unless PK-12 educational leaders strive to eliminate a culture of low expectations (Kohli, 2009) for Latino youth deeply rooted in the majoritarian norms (Huber et al., 2008) of many educators. Such dismissive pedagogy appears to still be quite prevalent, particularly in districts that service large socioeconomically-disadvantaged Latino populations. Consider the following observations of a participant regarding low expectations for all minorities in her current school of employment:

> I would venture to say that our advanced level classes don't have a lot of our Samoan population of students in them, don't have a lot of our African-American students, and don't have a lot of our Hispanic students in them. It almost seems like, "Well, if you can just get by that's good enough 'cause, darn it, you're here and that's good enough."

Ultimately, as the same subject further articulated, it is necessary for all of the cogs within the educational machine to work in tandem to curb generational trends of mediocrity and the perpetuation of low expectations due to the perception that one is not good enough to try at least:

> I think it's a roundabout thing. I think partially it's the counselors, partially it's the teachers, seeing a student that's got the intellect or the drive and saying, "You can do this, and you can do it!" Sometimes it just takes looking at the student and saying, "You can do this. This is not above your understanding; stick with it and you'll be fine." And part of it is the administrators, saying, "You should not just take basic English. If you have a certain GPA, you really need to be thinking about the... advanced classes. There really isn't a reason for you not to be doing that." I think it comes from the teachers.

The previous quote thus accentuates the need for added institutional support (Stanton-Salazar, 1997) through the provision of funds of knowledge, particularly in the myriad of institutional obstacles that one must assiduously navigate simply to walk in the door of most postsecondary institutions. One subject, a first-generation college graduate and educator, gave a simple response that many Latinos or other disadvantaged populations might echo: "I don't remember teachers mentioning college to me."

Accordingly, PK-16 educational leaders should heed the suggestion of multiple participants that outreach to Latino youth should begin proactively during the formative years of middle school and secondary school, not reactively once (or if) these youth go to college. Research affirmed several participant's assertions that educational leaders should offer encouragement and incentives to consider teaching (Peterson & Nadler, 2009) through authentic programming that respects and validates the motivational variations between Latinos and their majority peers (Oliva & Staudt, 2003). Only one participant decided to become a PK-12 educator at a young age; teaching was clearly a second choice for the remaining participants. Two participants respectively considered law school and criminal justice before entering their postsecondary education programs, almost by default as one of them recollected: "And I thought, 'Eh...I can do it.' Started taking education classes and I thought, 'Okay, I like it enough,' and I just went through it." As Richardson and Watt (2005) conjectured, educational leaders must do a better job of educating young people that education can be a career that "fits their skill sets, interests, and future goals" (p. 487). Otherwise, many young Latinos may never cultivate the desire to become educators themselves during the formative years. Conversely, the number of Latino youth who view a PK-12 educational career "as a prestigious career option with opportunities for supportive interaction with other students and faculty" (Ramirez, 2009, p. 21) will remain grossly disproportionate to the demographic shift outside the educational milieu.

The conclusions, based on the study findings, illustrate the cumulative effect of a PK-16 educational leader's actions in further facilitating the acquisition of social capital necessary for talented Latino youth to

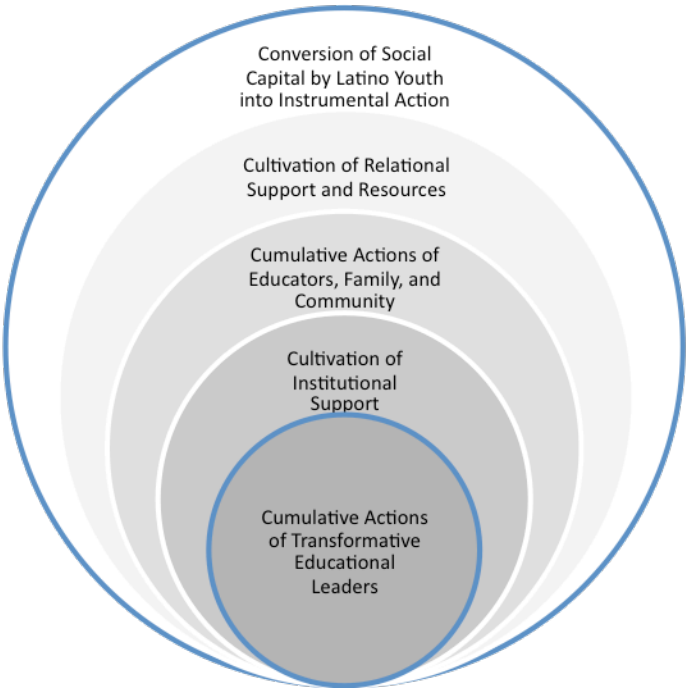

Figure 1. Conclusions Based on Study Findings.

pursue a postsecondary degree in PK-12 education. The cumulative actions of transformative educational leaders via the conduits of relational support and institutional support are thus represented above in Figure 1.

At the core of this paradigm is the self, where personal values are the leader's initial source for guidance, however laden they may be with biases and imperfections (Brown, 2004). Ethical leaders must acknowledge that the needs of Latino youth are often strikingly divergent from their majority peers. Conversely, as opposed to the employment of difference-blind institutionalism (Larson & Ovando, 2001), leaders must adopt a philosophy of additive schooling (Valenzuela, 1999) for all disadvantaged youth, including Latinos, if more of these individuals are ever to persist to the postsecondary milieu, much less pursue a career in PK-12 education.

Limitations

As Merriam (1998) conjectured, "case studies can oversimplify or exaggerate a situation, leading the reader to erroneous conclusions" (p. 42). To this end, assertions of generalizability could have been enhanced by stratifying the population before selecting the sample to better reflect the true characteristics of the desired population (Fowler, 2002). However, a sample of this size was not practicable to the study at-hand. Moreover, as Merriam and Associates (2002) posited, small samples are often "selected precisely because the researcher wishes to understand the particular in depth, not to find out what is generally true of the many" (p. 28).

Consequently, the researchers followed the guidelines as posited by Creswell (2007) for *naturalistic generalizations*, focusing on six cases (i.e., subjects) from which rich, thick description was gleaned so as to "determine how closely their situations match, and thus whether findings can be transferred" (Merriam & Associates, 2002, p. 29). Undergirding all of this process were the criteria of sufficiency and saturation (Merriam & Associates, 2002; Seidman, 2006). As Seidman (2006) articulated, "'Enough' is an interactive reflection of every step of the interview process and different for each study and each researcher" (p. 55).

The use of interviews as a central data collection instrument also poses certain limitations. Participants may be reluctant to tell of certain incidents. In addition, the use of counterstories as part of the interview protocol can be somewhat problematic. As Litowitz (2009) argued, storytelling places more emphasis on the aesthetic and emotional dimensions of narration that can lead in any direction: "If one set of narratives can make us *more* sympathetic to people of color, it stands to reason that a different set of narratives can make us *less* sensitive" (p. 303). Ultimately, as Seidman (2006) espoused, "If the researcher's goal…is to understand the meaning people in education make of their experience, then interviewing provides a necessary, if not always completely sufficient, avenue of inquiry" (p. 11), so long as the interviewer has the capacity to produce knowledge through his interaction with each conversational partner (Kvale & Brinkman,

2009; Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

The use of CRT/LatCrit as one of the conceptual frameworks of the study also poses certain limitations, specifically the essentialist notion that CRT/LatCrit researchers simplistically treat all people of color similarly (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Sleeter & Delgado Bernal, 2003; Trucios-Haynes, 2001). Taylor (2009) expanded on this notion, positing that the framework "can be accused of lacking coherence, since oppressed people are rarely monolithic, and their narratives reflect a wide range of experiences" (p. 12). It is thus imperative that CRT/LatCrit scholars view race as a fluid and dynamic concept (Sleeter & Delgado Bernal, 2003) and that "one's identity is not based on...race, but rather is multidimensional and intersects with various experiences" (Delgado Bernal, 2002, p. 118). The researchers focused exclusively on educators of Mexican American descent, thus attempting to construct community among all Latino subgroups (Trucios-Haynes, 2001) by expanding the knowledge base on one subgroup in particular, as opposed to making sweeping (and perhaps invalid) generalizations about the Latino population as a whole.

Finally, if one is to pursue a critical approach to research, it is imperative to appraise one's personal biases before proceeding. Rather than trying to eliminate these biases, the qualitative researcher should "systematically reflect on who he or she is in the inquiry," thus becoming more "sensitive to his or her personal biography and how it shapes the study" (Creswell, 2003, p. 182). Rubin and Rubin (2005) expanded on this assertion when noting, "Interviewers are not expected to be neutral or automatons," yet they have an imperative "to be self-aware, examining… biases and expectations that might influence the interviewee" (p. 30). Finally, the CRT/LatCrit researcher should aim for some modicum of equilibrium in his or her positionality. As Litowitz (2009) espoused, "The outside perspective is valuable in the first place because it provides check and balance against the views of the insiders; so that what results is an overall balance between inside and outside. And that is our goal – a balanced view" (p. 307).

Implications for Practice

The study findings indicate the paramount need for support on both a relational and institutional basis in order for Latinos (and other marginalized populations) to academically persist at the level of rigor necessary to successfully pursue a postsecondary education, much less a degree in PK-12 education. These findings supported the emphasis by Lin (2001), Portes (1998), and Yosso (2005) of the need for Latino youth to accumulate at least as much (if not more) social capital as their majority peers, given the deficit of social capital they often bring to the table. With the cumulative accretion of social capital comes the enhanced ability to secure resources through durable social networks that allow these youth to access information, influence, and social credentials while reinforcing and recognizing their Latino identity (Lin, 2001). Moreover, the more substantial the deposit of social capital, the more likely it will be that these youth will have the "instrumental and emotional support to navigate through society's institutions" (Yosso, 2005, p. 79) for the long-term.

The study findings also suggested a need for heightened critical collaboration among PK-16 educational leaders as well as with the people they purportedly serve, including Latino youth who may not have yet been compelled to expect the exceptional in themselves due to the perpetuation of subtractive schooling (Venezuela, 1999) practices in their educational institutions. Ultimately, no program or policy will bolster the recruitment of talented Latino youth to the PK-12 educational ranks unless such programs and policies are predicated upon an authentic commitment to diversity in PK-12 institutions. As Schuhmann (1992) asserted two decades ago, future "language used to refer to ethnic minorities in schools... must reject such terms and concepts of the past as *remediation* and *language deficien*t" (p. 103). Educators, regardless of their own race or ethnicity, must be agents of social change and justice and relentless advocates for all of their students, particularly those stuck in the headwaters of PK-12 education (Solorzano et al., 2005), those who have yet to visualize the vast ocean on the horizon and its limitless potential.

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