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ADDRESSING THE EDUCATIONAL CHALLENGES OF LATINO STUDENTS

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Abstract

One of the largest minority student populations in the United States is Latinos. Despite the large population, there is a significant achievement gap between Latino students and their white classmates. This literature review examines the issues Latino students face at school and how educators can help bridge the gap and increase achievement. Research shows that there are several factors that contribute to this educational gap including student discrimination, lack of parental involvement, an underrepresentation of Latino students in advanced classes and language issues for bilingual students. Many of these issues can be resolved or decreased by educators of Latino students. Schools can create programs that engage Latino learners and support their bilingual abilities. Researchers found that teachers can learn to better connect with their diverse students through culturally relevant and immersion trainings. Culturally responsive teaching is an effective method that allows teachers to gain an understanding of their students' backgrounds, which increases student engagement and achievement.

Table of Contents

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Introduction

The United States is a country with a diverse populace and inhabitants from different backgrounds, ethnicities, races and heritages. While this diversity makes for a culturally rich and innovative population, there are also challenges to addressing the needs and interests of so many unique individuals. The education system is designed to educate all students who call the United States home; no matter their race, ethnicity, income, ability or background. With such a diverse student population, it is necessary that educators take into account the differences each student brings to their classroom (Butvilofsky, Escamilla, Soltero-González, & Aragon, 2012). Schools must identify the challenges minority students face and find ways to ameliorate these issues.

There have been many attempts to provide equality in our schools. In 1954, the Brown vs. Board of Education case ruled racial segregation as unconstitutional and was the first step towards decreasing racial inequalities in American schools (Muller, Riegle-Crumb, Schiller, Wilkinson, & Frank, 2010). Since then, there has been the illusion of equality in the American education system, although systematically there are still major disparities racially and ethnically (Irizarry, 2007). Even schools that are diverse can still be internally unequal through academic opportunities. Many minority students do not take advanced classes, reducing the opportunities students have to interact with diverse classmates. Because of this unintended segregation, there is no experience of the benefits of diversity (Muller et al., 2010).

One minority student group facing educational challenges is Latinos. Latinos are a diverse ethnic group of people who have cultural ties to Latin America. Many Latinos, although not all, speak Spanish. Because Latinos come from all over Latin America, they have a variety of experiences, backgrounds and immigration patterns (Benner & Graham, 2011). This literature

review considers the experiences of Latinos with origins to various Latin American countries, both American citizens and recent immigrants.

Latinos are the fastest growing minority group in schools in the United States (Niehaus, Rudasill, & Adelson, 2012). From 2002 to 2012, the Latino student population increased by 39% (Albers & Frederick, 2013). Because this is a rapidly growing cultural group, educators need to be aware of ways they can facilitate learning for these diverse learners. So far, there has not been much success for Latino students in the American education system. There is a significant achievement gap between Latino students and white students that has not decreased in the past twenty years (Brooke-Garza, 2015). The education system has not worked to close this gap, despite research proving such a gap exists (Bell, White, Hatchimonji, Stepney, & Elias, 2019). One reason for this gap is that many American schools are based on Eurocentric cultures and systems, making it difficult for teachers to recognize the needs of diverse student populations (Walker & Pearsall, 2010).

Many Latino students are English language learners (ELL). This means that they often speak Spanish as their native language and are learning English while they attend school. In fact, the majority of ELL students, nearly 80%, in the United States speak Spanish as their first language (Escamilla, Chávez, & Vigil, 2005; Butvilofsky et al., 2012). Acquiring English is an important factor in achievement for immigrant students (Kolano, Lewis, & Kissau, 2012). Since there are so many ELL Spanish speakers, schools must be willing to accommodate the linguistic challenges students encounter so that they can become successful learners.

In this literature review, the issues Latino students face will be studied, along with the ways educators can accommodate their diverse learners. This paper will explore issues that educators can identify as problematic for Latino learners. Once these issues have been identified,

teachers can reach out to their students with a more comprehensive understanding of their educational struggles. Some of the issues investigated in this literature review include: the effect of discrimination on Latino students, and how it can lead to low academic achievement. The benefits of culturally responsive teaching will also be examined, along with the language development of bilingual Latino students. Other aspects addressed include the importance of family involvement in school, the advantages of after school programs, and the underrepresentation of Latinos in advanced classes. Finally, the importance of diversity in teacher training will be examined, as well as examples of exemplary teachers who are able to engage Latino learners and increase their levels of achievement. All of these issues are addressed through the lens of educator involvement, how teachers and schools can better support the issues Latino students encounter.

Rationale

It is necessary to review the literature on the achievement gap for Latino students because of the increasing diversity of the student population in the United States. As diversity among students grow, it will be more imperative that any cultural differences are addressed in the classroom. Teachers play a crucial role in improving the issues diverse students experience in school (Butvilofsky et al., 2012). Teachers want all their students to have an opportunity for achievement and in order to accomplish this goal, they must be willing to identify and acknowledge the issues that minority students face.

This literature review will focus specifically on Latino students because they are the fastest growing minority group in the United States today (Witenko, Mireles-Rios & Rios, 2017). Teachers can expect that they will have an increasing number of Latino students in their classrooms in the next few years. While the Latino population grows, the needs of Latino

students are clearly not being met at school. In addition to an achievement gap, Latino students score an average of twenty points lower on standardized tests than white students (Brooke-Garza, 2015), as well as graduate high school and attend college at lower rates than white and Asian students (Riconscente, 2014). The Latino population is currently facing discrimination and anti-immigrant attitudes from policy makers, so it is necessary that educators understand their students culturally in order to make them feel more welcome in the classroom (Brooke-Garza, 2015).

Despite the increase in Latino students, there is still limited research on the educational issues they encounter (Albers & Frederick, 2013). It is necessary to review the existing literature to understand what educators can do to facilitate Latino learners and to eventually discover areas where further research will be beneficial. One reason why it is important to focus on solving educational issues is that the consequences of schooling follow students their whole lives. Culturally diverse students, including Latinos, must excel in school in order to succeed in other aspects of their lives (Sosa & Gomez, 2012). If students do not achieve during their educational experience, it can affect their well-being and socioeconomic status as they become adults (Muller et al., 2010). A solid educational foundation is crucial to developing well-rounded adults.

Definition of Terms

Some terms that require defining will be used throughout this literature review. They are detailed below.

The *achievement gap* is a difference in measurable achievement levels among students of different races or ethnicities. This literature review will focus on the lower achievement levels of Latino students, compared to their white and Asian classmates.

Bilingual students will be discussed throughout this paper. A *bilingual* student is one who speaks two different languages. In the studies presented here, bilingual students are native Spanish speakers who are learning English as they progress through school. *Emergent bilinguals* are native Spanish speakers who are starting school and capable of learning through two language systems. Any student who is learning English is referred to as an *English Language Learner (ELL)*. *Biliteracy* is another term that will be addressed. This is the process of a bilingual student developing literacy in both languages without formal instruction. A bilingual student may employ *translanguaging*. This is the description of a concept using two different languages at the same time.

One of the practices used to engage Latino learners is *Culturally Responsive Teaching*. This is a method of teaching that includes cultural awareness and allows students to connect their cultural context to the class material. A teacher who uses culturally responsive techniques may be considered a *culturally connected teacher*. This is someone who recognizes how members of a cultural group define their culture and how it can contribute positively to the classroom environment. Some culturally relevant teachers are members of a *Community of Progress (CoP)*, a teacher-led group of educators who focus on building cultural awareness in their curriculum and classrooms.

There are several programs that address the needs of bilingual students. These include *Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL)*, which is an in-classroom program that assists students who are learning English in addition to their native language. *Two-Way Bilingual Immersion (TWBI)* is another program. Here, instruction is given in two languages for bilingual students to learn both of their languages with proficiency.

Statement of Question

The question addressed in this paper is: How can educators identify and address the unique challenges Latino students face in school?

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, the specific issues Latino students face in the classroom will be reviewed as well as how teachers can better meet the needs of these students. Some of the issues addressed include: how Latino students experience discrimination in school, underrepresentation of Latino students in advanced courses, and how bilingual students develop language skills. Teacher trainings and culturally responsive pedagogy, parental involvement and after-school programs for Latino students will also be reviewed.

Research Strategy

The studies were found using research the databases ERIC and JSTOR. Relevant articles were obtained using some of the following keywords: Latino students, achievement gap, teaching, diversity in education, culturally relevant teaching. The analyzed articles described qualitative research studies.

Latino Students' Perceived Experience of Discrimination

Negative classroom experiences such as discrimination and stereotyping can lead to a lack in student achievement. (Quiroz, 1997). It is apparent that these negative experiences increase throughout the school experience (Benner & Graham, 2011; Quiroz, 1997). Benner and Graham (2011) studied the perception of discrimination of Latino students during their first two years of high school; coming to the conclusion that, in general, Latino students' perceived experiences of discrimination increased over these first two years. Some factors determined the level of discrimination perceptions, including gender. The discrimination of boys increased at a faster rate than it did in girls. There was no difference in discrimination based on a student's country of origin, generational status, or home and school language. Students whose parents

relied on them to translate faced more discrimination than those who did not act as language brokers.

Benner and Graham (2011) discovered that the more ethnically and racially diverse a school is, the greater the rate of perceived discrimination increases. They concluded that students can better navigate high school when they have peers of the same ethnicity. The Latino students who participated in Benner and Graham's (2011) study came from middle schools that had a larger percentage of Latino students. The transition to high school proved to be more difficult because the percentage of Latino students decreased while the percentage of more diverse ethnicities increased. Students felt less connected to their schools and did not perform as well academically.

Benner and Graham (2011) found that students taught by a more diverse teaching staff were less likely to perceive discrimination. Diversity in staff can "buffer perceptions of discrimination" (Benner & Graham, 2011, p. 515). When students found their ethnic group's representation declining in high school, those with a more diverse teaching staff felt less isolated during that transition.

Latino students who experienced discrimination had a negative perception of school climate and were therefore more likely to be absent. Benner and Graham (2011) did not find a relation between discrimination and students' grades, but the high number of absences and reactions to negative school climate suggest that Latino students who feel discriminated against may be in the beginning of academic disengagement and that higher absences may eventually lead to lower achievement.

Quiroz (1997) studied how Latino students can internalize the discrimination they face in school and how that affects their perception of themselves. Quiroz (1997) focused on

autobiographies written by Latino students in eighth grade and again in eleventh grade. Through their personal narratives, Quiroz (1997) found that as Latino students go through school, they are likely to blame themselves for negative classroom experiences. They believe that they are unsuccessful in school because they were not able to grasp various concepts, not because there were issues with the school or their teachers' ability to connect with them. Quiroz (1997) additionally noted that the older these students got, the more likely they were to acknowledge that these issues could come from their educational institutions. By the time the participants were in eleventh grade, they mentioned more frequently teacher apathy and boredom in class. Quiroz (1997) mentions that students initially feel lost or confused in school, but eventually this feeling turns to resentment towards education in general.

Quiroz (1997) believes that by the end of high school Latino students develop a sense of self she calls "the defeated self." These students do not feel that they are able to be successful in or outside of school. While they may have believed they would gain opportunities to become successful when they were early in their school career, by eleventh grade they will have lost that optimism. Defeated students cannot identify their strengths, successes or abilities. This is mainly because they do not see school as a supportive environment (Quiroz, 1997).

Because Latino students do not feel encouraged in school, it is especially important that teachers are aware of the attention they give to each student and be sure that this is equitable (Bell, White, Hatchimonji, Stepney, & Elias, 2019). Teachers should be prepared to discuss students' futures with them and give them guidance on how to plan for a successful future. Opportunities should be made apparent to students, specifically culturally diverse students who do not have cultural norms to fall back on.

Bell et al. (2019) looked at how school climate influenced Language Arts grades for low-income middle-school Latino students. Bell et al. (2019) specifically focused on Social-Normative Expectations, which show how a student perceives school expectations, future achievement and overall school environment. Bell et al. (2019) found a negative relationship between students' perception of school climate and academic success.

Bell et al. (2019) noted that students who felt that their classmates would be less successful, performed better in Language Arts classes. Bell et al. (2019) believe that this shows successful students see their classmates' lack of achievement and choose to differentiate themselves. Students may be motivated to go against negative stereotypes and become more successful in the classroom. Bell et al. (2019) also believe that these students could be more successful because they are capable of accurately interpreting their school climate (that it is low-achieving) and therefore more likely to use these analytical skills to become successful in Language Arts classes.

Bell et al. (2019) found that students who had a positive perception of their school's environment and of their peers were less successful in Language Arts classes. These students unrealistically evaluate their school environment perhaps because they do not have the ability to accurately interpret Social-Normative Expectations.

Bell et al. (2019) conclude that how students think about achievement affects their ultimate success. A positive attitude may not always lead to academic success. Many students must encounter negative classroom environments in order to achieve.

Perceived loneliness of Latino students is one of these negative experiences. Heredia Jr., Sanchez Gonzalez, Rosner, He, Castillo and Ojeda (2017) studied how relationships affect loneliness and well-being in Latino students. A students' well-being is related to higher reading

scores, attendance, academic success and self-esteem. Heredia Jr. et al. (2017) found that students who have high levels of loneliness also have high levels of well-being, perhaps because lonely students are more capable of coping with social stress without affecting their mental health. Heredia Jr. et al. (2017) found that of lonely Latino students, those who have greater support from both peers and families also have greater levels of well-being. This indicates that peer support and family support is key to navigating various stressors in school. Heredia Jr. et al. (2017) believe that if a lonely student is able to connect with their peers or families, they will not feel socially frustrated.

Heredia Jr. et al. (2017) believe that it is imperative for teachers and school staff to provide culturally relevant teaching and in-school interventions for Latino students who feel lonely. It is important to acknowledge student loneliness and the importance of support from families and peers. Heredia Jr. et al. (2017) suggest creating assignments and activities that include family members and peers. Teachers can also highlight the importance of student organizations and family events to lonely students. Heredia Jr. et al. (2017) believe that interventions for Latino students should be culturally relevant. With culturally relevant services, teachers can emphasize the necessity of supportive relationships with both peers and families. This will help Latino students feel less lonely, and allow them to better navigate school stressors, ultimately improving their well-being (Heredia Jr. et al., 2017).

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

The importance of making connections with students, especially cultural connections, is to help their development and learning. This is the center of culturally responsive pedagogy, where it is important to connect a student's cultural background to the classroom environment

and learning goals. Irizarry (2007) focused on the effects of culturally responsive teaching on students of the Latino community.

Irizarry (2007) concluded that students and teachers need to have an agreed upon mode of communication for the classroom. Generally, it is the teacher who decides what form of language is used, requiring students to give up their style of communication to fit the norms of the class. A culturally responsive classroom allows the students to bring to each lesson their own unique contributions. Students are not punished for expressing themselves in their own way but are instead free to share their identities and use these to help them learn.

Irizarry (2007) studied one class where the teacher employed culturally responsive methods and found that this particular classroom was successful because the classroom environment and culture was contributed to by all students. Each student was able to bring their own identities, experiences and cultural contributions to the classroom. Instead of the students conforming to the teacher's ideal classroom culture, they were able to add their own perspectives.

Irizarry (2007) believed that the observed teacher was successful in creating a culturally responsive approach because he understood his students' communities and realities. Irizarry considered this teacher a *culturally connected* teacher because he lived in and actively engaged in his students' communities. A culturally connected teacher understands that culture is not a static identity. A student's culture cannot be defined by their racial or ethnic characteristics, each member of a cultural group defines their identities in different ways. A successful culturally connected teacher understands that there is a "hybrid identity" that can occur in a classroom from members of different cultural communities (Irizarry, 2007). These members negotiate their cultural identities so that there is a unique identity for the entire classroom.

A thorough understanding of student culture is key in culturally responsive teaching. Irizarry and Raible (2011) observed teachers who used culturally responsive pedagogy and found that they often spent immersive experiences living with Latino families. Many of these teachers grew up in diverse cities and had exposure to other cultures through their everyday activities. They had friends, neighbors, classmates and coworkers who were members of the Latino community. Building these relationships gave teachers insight into their students' communities and cultural realities.

An aspect Irizarry and Raible (2011) found exemplary teachers had in common was language. Participants who only spoke English sought out opportunities to learn Spanish. Several made a point of visiting Latin American and Spanish-speaking countries in order to immerse themselves in the language and gain a cultural perspective. They found it a vital way to connect with their Spanish-speaking Latino students. The students were more engaged as they helped their teacher with the process of learning their language. The give and take and apparent cultural interest allowed the students to buy into their learning in the classroom. An understanding of Spanish also allowed teachers to communicate with parents and continue to strengthen those relationships.

Irizarry and Raible (2011) found that almost half the participants were able to seek out an immersive learning experience by living with or spending significant time with Spanish-speaking communities. Participants found these experiences invaluable in deepening their understanding of their Latino students' cultures and communities. Teachers who spent time in their students' cultural societies used sources of knowledge and resources from these communities. All teachers found that they learned a lot through building relationships with their students' families. They did not discount this as a source of information. Irizarry and Raible (2011) concluded that in

order for educators and schools to successfully engage Latino students, they must look to Latino

communities and family members for input in the process of improvement and interventions.

López (2016) studied ways teachers can gain this cultural awareness and apply it to their

curriculum. López (2016) also found that teachers who believed it was important to understand

their students' cultures had students with more academic success. Teachers who found value in

identifying the ways that educational curriculum could harm Latino students also had classes

with better outcomes. López (2016) stresses the necessity of teachers learning about school and

social structures that marginalize students and finding ways to improve them. Teachers should

also be aware of current social issues and how these affect their students.

López (2016) also found that teachers who have been trained in language and culture

(including bilingual teachers) are more critically aware and are better able to understand how

cultural differences affect students. Teachers who are bilingual are more exposed to cultural

diversity. Any teacher with a bilingual endorsement is also required to take classes on culture

and linguistics, which leads to them become more culturally responsive in the classroom. López

(2016) believes that teachers who are more open to dual-language and bilingual programs are

already more culturally aware and can take this knowledge into the classroom in order to

ultimately connect with their Latino students. López (2016) found that although some Latino

students observed were not ELLs, they still responded positively to Spanish instruction. López

(2016) credits this to the fact that language and culture are deeply connected. Dual language

programs can only decrease the Latino achievement gap because of this relationship between

language and culture. Lessons in Spanish automatically tap into cultural awareness since the

perception of language ultimately shapes a culture.

Ordoñez-Jasis, Dunsmore, Herrera, Ochoa, Diaz, and Zuniga-Rios (2016) also looked at how teachers could effectively create culturally engaging curriculum for Latino students. Ordoñez-Jasis et al. (2016) focused specifically on a method of culturally responsive teaching called communities of practice (CoP). A CoP is a group of teachers who discuss ways to build cultural proficiency and create reciprocal relationships with families and communities near their school. These teachers wanted to focus on literacy curriculum that was more accessible and equitable for Latino students. Ordoñez-Jasis et al. (2016) found that CoPs were effective in changing teachers' perspectives, many teachers began to realize that they previously had not understood or respected the resources and knowledge each student brings to the classroom.

Teachers in the CoPs Ordoñez-Jasis et al. (2016) studied were able to research the communities their students came from and eventually created a curriculum from what they learned. This curriculum was relevant to their students' lives outside the classroom. Teachers in the CoP looked at issues and sociocultural structures in their students' communities and found ways to address topics that were significant in their students' lives. Ordoñez-Jasis et al. (2016) found that through these personal connections, Latino students were more engaged and able to create new voices that allowed them to form identities. Students were able to look at literacy and connect it to their own cultures and communities.

In addition to making connections, teachers encouraged students to bring in resources and artifacts from their everyday lives to create connections. Students improved their writing skills as they developed learning in and out of school, Ordoñez-Jasis et al. (2016) found. Students were more likely to be seen as resources in the classroom and unique individuals who had a personal story to contribute. Ordoñez-Jasis et al. (2016) believe that it is necessary for teachers to acknowledge that learning that happens outside the classroom is just as valid as inside the

classroom. It is important for teachers to seek out knowledge and resources from their students' communities to better understand what motivates them. Through collaboration, the CoP was able to create lessons that directly connected to student culture and community, ultimately improving student engagement and understanding.

Lo, Correa and Anderson (2015) studied the use of culturally responsive social skill instruction (SSI) for Latino students, specifically males. SSI is used to teach essential skills to students while regarding their culture and experiences. Lo et al. (2015) found that this culturally responsive instruction helped increase social interactions in the classroom for Latino male students. Their cross-cultural interactions also increased. Lo et al. (2015) believe that these findings show that culturally responsive interactions should be included in school behavioral support.

Lo et al. (2015) found these SSIs uniquely productive for ELL Latino students because the curriculum promoted interactions among students across cultural divides. The SSI instruction method included videos that modeled cross-cultural connections, although it never explicitly ordered students to make these interactions. As a result, the study participants were more likely to interact with non-Latino students during recess. These interactions eventually led to an increase in verbal communication in English. Because participants began to use more English in a social setting, Lo et al. (2015) found that they ultimately became more comfortable using English in and out of the classroom.

Lo et al. (2015) discovered that culturally responsive SSIs were able to help Latino ELLs improve their social needs. This, in turn, helped students do better in the classroom and encouraged them to become comfortable using English. The SSI program was successful because it effectively promoted students' cultural background and everyday knowledge. Lo et al.

(2015) believe that teachers must support social learning among Latino students as it ultimately leads to cross-cultural relationships. Lo et al. (2015) saw that this helped Latino ELLs adjust to the classroom and feel more accepted.

Language Development of Bilingual Students

In addition to cultural differences, there is often a language component that affects the learning and development of Latino students. While not all Latino students speak Spanish as their native language, it can prove to be another factor that isolates Latino learners, ultimately increasing the learning gap (Kolano, Lewis, & Kissau, 2012). It is important for teachers to recognize these language differences, as language is closely connected to culture and can be another window into a student's cultural background (López, 2016). There are several different ways to work with bilingual students, including duo-language programs where both English and Spanish are used in the classroom, or where students initially receive instruction in Spanish and eventually work up to more English. Some bilingual Latino students spend the majority of their school day in a monolingual English classroom and spend a limited amount of time in ELL instruction.

Kolano et al. (2012) researched one of these classrooms. They studied Spanish speaking students in monolingual English classrooms who were occasionally pulled out for ELL instruction. These students' first language (L1) was Spanish and their second language (L2) was English. Generally, bilingual students get the impression that using their native language is a problem in the classroom (Kolano et al., 2012). This can lead to the loss of their native language through lack of use. Losing their first language will eventually cause immigrant students to distance themselves from their cultural roots.

Kolano et al. (2012) observed a kindergarten classroom and found that silence was emphasized in the classroom. This expectation created an unfriendly climate. Because there were constant reminders of silence and punishments for talking out of turn, students did not have the chance to communicate and develop linguistic skills.

Kolano et al. (2012) noticed Spanish speaking students were often physically separated in the classroom. This took a toll on their language development in both Spanish and English. An ELL student was often surrounded by native English-speakers, so when they needed help, they had no one to turn to. The teachers had stated that they did not have an issue with students speaking Spanish in the classroom, but there were many practices in place that prevented Latino students from speaking Spanish.

Kalona et al. (2012) stress the importance of identifying and rectifying classroom practices that harm native-language retention and English development. These practices in the classroom, together with negative attitudes, can cause students to lose their native language and delay proficiency in English. Even teachers with positive and supportive attitudes might not have the tools to promote L1 retention and L2 development. Kalona et al. (2012) recommend teacher trainings that specifically address the issues of diverse student needs and teaching.

Kalona et al. (2012) suggest these teacher trainings focus on culturally responsive training and TESOL. Teachers of ELLs must create a welcoming classroom environment where students feel comfortable participating and engaging with one another, with an emphasis on language output.

Monolingual English classrooms are not the only method in working with bilingual students. Brooke-Garza (2015) focused on two-way bilingual immersion (TWBI) and how it affects Latino bilingual students. A TWBI classroom gives instruction in both the target language

(in this case Spanish) and in English, so that native speakers of both languages can learn their

language and the second language in an immersion atmosphere. Although TWBI instruction

seeks to lessen the gap between Latino and white students, Brooke-Garza (2015) noted that there

was still division in the classroom. This was mostly due to socioeconomic factors, rather than

linguistic or ethnic differences. Brooke-Garza (2015) suggests that teachers should be aware of

these differences and should focus on trainings that address the needs of low-income students. It

is important to advocate and encourage equitable social interactions in the classroom. Teachers

should be able to move away from the idea that students are divided by language and cultural

backgrounds and instead consider socioeconomic factors, according to Brooke-Garza (2015).

Another inconsistency Brooke-Garza (2015) noticed with TWBI was that English and

Spanish were not equally valued in the classroom, and certainly outside it. Eurocentric attitudes

were prevalent and the English language was held to a higher regard. The community around the

school valued English and tests, announcements, meetings and assemblies within the school were

all in English, giving students the impression that this language was more important. All these

actions sent a message that the English language and American culture were of a greater value

than Spanish. To counter this, Brooke-Garza (2015) saw teachers model cultural competency to

show Latino students how to competently build up their own cultural identity. Brooke-Garza

(2015) encourages teachers to set an example by building cultural competency which allows

students to be proud of their background.

Babino and Stewart (2017) also looked at Latino students in dual language schools to

understand the value they place on their languages. These students were native Spanish speakers

who learned English in school. They all valued both languages and their bilingual ability,

although Babino and Stewart (2017) found that the majority of students preferred English to

Spanish in academic and social settings. Babino and Stewart (2017) find this concerning because a student who does not value their native language is at risk of losing it.

Like Brooke-Garza (2015), Babino and Stewart (2017) observed that these bilingual students were constantly receiving messages that English is a more important language. These students lived in a society that valued English and consistently saw people in positions of authority use English. Even within their dual-language school, English was used among principals, counselors and other staff members of importance. Babino and Stewart (2017) found that bilingual students considered the Spanish speakers in their lives as people who do not hold much power. These students were likely to have Spanish-speaking family members who either stayed at home or had working-class jobs. Another way Babino and Stewart (2017) found English to be held to a higher regard was in school-to-home communication. Meetings, announcements, and informative flyers were all in English.

Babino and Stewart (2017) suggest that teachers pay attention to how they use language and to find ways to promote the use of Spanish in bilingual students. Teachers of dual language schools should critically observe when they are using Spanish and English and be sure to model use of Spanish to their students (for example, when talking to a colleague). Teachers should communicate a message that all languages are important. Babino and Stewart (2017) believe that the use of a students' native language is one of their most important tools and its significance should not be downplayed. Teachers have a large role in supporting and promoting bilingualism as something to be valued.

Soto Huerta (2017) researched *emergent bilinguals*, students who are able to learn in school through two different languages, with a focus on their reading comprehension. These students were again native Spanish speakers who were learning English. Soto Huerta (2017)

focused on using two languages to show reading comprehension and critical thinking. Soto Huerta (2017) found that while reading texts on the topic of slavery, students were able to show comprehension and make connections to their personal lives by *translanguaging*, the use of both English and Spanish. This method shows that student input is valued, despite the language used. Translanguaging allowed students to contribute and create a discussion that they felt comfortable in, because they were not focused on restricting their comments to only one language. Soto Huerta (2017) concluded that translanguaging supports reading comprehension and critical thinking.

Soto Huerta (2017) found many reading comprehension strategies that supported learners of English. One strategy was oral guiding questions that allowed students to respond in whatever language they felt comfortable using, and sometimes a mix of the two languages. Cooperative learning activities also helped ELL students engage with the text and with each other, as they were able to make personal connections to the text and build a natural discussion. Soto Huerta (2017) found that pausing during read aloud time gave students a chance to digest the text and that asking students to summarize a portion of the text in either language showed what they comprehended. Summarizing could either happen as a class discussion or as a reflective writing activity.

According to Soto Huerta (2017), dialogue among students was particularly important as it allowed students to think critically, interpret the text, make connections and solve problems. The focus in these lessons was on meaning as opposed to separating languages. Student contributions were richer and less forced because they were free to express themselves in whichever language was appropriate to them. Emergent bilinguals were able to build their own

voice through translanguaging and students felt comfortable sharing and learning from one another.

Much of the research focused on reading skills in bilingual students and how biliteracy ultimately develops. De la Luz Reyes (2012) defines biliteracy as the acquisition of two languages in young learners through linguistic and cultural connections. It is a process that uses all aspects of language including culture and identity. Bilingual children are able to cross linguistic borders and experiment reading and writing in a second language even before they achieve fluency.

De la Luz Reyes (2012) observed two students who were bilingual and their journey to acquiring biliteracy. Both students used both English and Spanish in the classroom and eventually were able to determine what language was suitable to their needs. De la Luz Reyes (2012) noted this practice showed that these students could effectively code switch and they were aware that their bilingualism was a part of who they are culturally. De la Luz Reyes (2012) believes that the two languages of a bilingual student do not need to be considered separate acquisition processes, as long as the student can control the application and understand when to use each language.

De la Luz Reyes (2012) believes that bilingualism is a necessary process for students to navigate their two cultures. It is not effective to ask students to ignore this part of who they are by forcing them to only use one language to develop their learning. Both of the students de la Luz Reyes (2012) studied used both Spanish and English to affirm their cultures in and out of the classroom.

De la Luz Reyes (2012) notes that bilingual teachers are key in helping facilitate biliteracy as they can implement instruction in both languages. Non-bilingual teachers can help

facilitate biliteracy as well. De la Luz Reyes (2012) suggests giving Latino students a few minutes after reading an English passage to work out meaning and make personal connections to the reading. This will facilitate critical thinking skills and help overall literacy. Teachers should also make sure that students have access to books that contain multicultural elements, such as diverse characters and cultures. Having a classroom that reflects diversity will help students see that all languages are valuable, de la Luz Reyes (2012) concludes.

Although much of the research shows that bilingual students have something unique to contribute to the classroom, there is still a persistent idea that language is the cause of the education gap for Latino students. Escamilla, Chávez, and Vigil (2005) researched this idea, specifically the causes of an educational gap among Spanish-speaking Latinos and the idea that language generates a barrier to success. Escamilla et al. (2005) found that many teachers held the belief that Spanish-speaking ELL students were less likely to do well on high stakes tests because of their low English level. Many educators felt that bilingual education programs also contributed to this lack of achievement and was generally harmful to student progress.

Escamilla et al. (2005) found that language was not a significant cause of the education gap for Latino students. They found that bilingual programs actually helped Spanish speaking ELLs perform better academically. Students were able to develop reading and writing skills in Spanish, a language they felt more comfortable in, and still meet state standards. Although general consensus is that the use of Spanish should be diminished and the use of English should be increased, Escamilla et al. (2005) do not agree that this is an effective method for ELL students.

Escamilla et al. (2005) suggest that educators need to regard data with a more critical eye in order to discover what is most beneficial for their students. The root of student gaps must be

correctly identified in order to find a solution that is successful. Escamilla et al. (2005) believe that teachers can only improve if they can acknowledge the actual educational needs of their students. Escamilla et al. (2005) agree that schools and teachers should not view student language difficulties as a problem that leads to low scores. Spanish-speaking ELLs can be successful at meeting learning targets despite language differences.

Parental Involvement in Latino Students' Education

While ELL students are often learning English in the classroom, their parents often do not have opportunities to learn English. In fact, parental involvement for Latino students in general is often lacking. (Latunde, 2017). This can add to the educational divide for Latino students. Latunde (2017) defines parental involvement as the actions parents take to give their children educational support both in and out of school. In order to bridge the gap between what happens at school and what families know, Latunde (2017) argues that it is important for schools to do the following: make sure parents know and understand the school's expectations, allow them to become familiar with the curriculum and increase their ability to help their students at home. If schools and teachers support and train their students' families, parental involvement can increase.

In Latunde's (2017) study, Latino families who were English Language Learners felt better receiving training from their children's school because culturally they see teachers and administrators as experts in learning and education. Latunde (2017) found that for ELL families, it was important for educators to connect to them by understanding their values, priorities and hopes for their children. It is therefore necessary that teachers and schools make an effort to reach out to these families and learn about their needs and values before providing training and support.

Participants of Latunde's (2017) study said that when educators sought them out, they learned a lot about how to meet their children's needs and what was happening in their schools. Their responses suggest that they found the new knowledge of value. This contradicts previous studies that find diverse families do not place value in their student's education. Parents and families want to help their children be successful in school but they are not aware of or do not feel comfortable accessing resources built to help support them (Latunde, 2017).

Latunde (2017) concluded that educators must place more emphasis on supporting their diverse students' families. Family involvement can help students be more successful in school and it is necessary to connect with students' families in order to start bridging the achievement gap. Although schools and teachers are the authorities on student learning and curriculum, they often do not have access to these families and their communities. Some educators also do not have a trusting relationship with diverse families. This is something that needs to be built by making an effort to understand these families' values and needs.

It is clear that schools are not reaching out to the families of their diverse students. How do the parents and families of Latino students view this issue? Becerra (2012) looked at educational issues that Latino parents perceived their children having in school. He found that one major perceived reason for Latino education gap was that white teachers did not understand Latino culture and therefore were not able to best motivate and engage their learning process. These perceptions may be founded in the participants' involvement with their students' schools and education, as parents with higher incomes and education levels are more likely to interact in their child's education (Becerra, 2012).

Like Latunde (2017), Becerra (2012) found that some of these cultural misunderstandings come from the norms that Latino parents view teachers as authority figures and are less likely to

ask questions or follow up during interactions with their child's teacher. White teachers often misinterpret nonverbal communication when interacting with Latino parents. Schools and teachers must find a better way to communicate with and establish a trustful relationship with Latino families.

Becerra (2012) found that it is important for educators working with diverse communities to research these communities and to support policy changes that create more culturally competent curriculum and educational systems. Because educators do not have a solid understanding of Latino culture and communities, they are more likely to stereotype and label their Latino students with learning or behavior issues. This lack of cultural knowledge also leads to educators being unable to engage their Latino students. Becerra (2012) also found that teachers who do not understand their Latino students' backgrounds are equally unable to relate to these children's parents. The lack of connection between parents and educators means that parents feel left out of their child's school life.

Becerra (2012) recommends educators use written or oral narratives during parent-teacher meetings in order to increase cultural understanding. Any parent-teacher meetings or informational sessions should be held at convenient times so that parents can be present for their children's' needs. Because some of the participants in Becerra's (2012) study felt left out due to low English levels, it is necessary to provide interpreters and translations.

After School Programs that Support Latino Students

Curwen and Colón-Muñiz (2013) looked at how an extended school day could affect Latino students, focusing on an enriching on-site after-school program. Curwen and Colón-Muñiz (2013) observed one school and discovered that this program was successful in reaching diverse student populations because the school's administrators supported a collaborative

relationship between classroom teachers and after-school program leaders. By allowing these educators to work together during the day, the after-school activities were enriched and aligned with classroom needs and goals. Curwen and Colón-Muñiz (2013) found it necessary to create an after-school program that was an extension of the school day rather than a unique, disconnected program.

After-school programs at schools in low-income areas generally focus on homework completion and remediation. In contrast, enrichment after-school programs are usually found in schools of higher-income neighborhoods. Curwen and Colón-Muñiz (2013) found it important to include enriching programs in schools with low-income and high diversity as well. Curwen and Colón-Muñiz (2013) believe that bilingual support in this program was especially necessary for these Latino students. Students were able to feel more comfortable using either language and to clarify linguistic or cultural misunderstandings.

Many Latino students have negative school experiences but through their findings, Curwen and Colón-Muñiz (2013) believe that an after-school extension program such as the one implemented at this school could help close the achievement gap. Curwen and Colón-Muñiz (2013) observed successful practices such as teacher collaboration and routine as well as use of both Spanish and English to facilitate learning.

Niehaus, Rudasill, and Adelson (2012) examined how the participation of Latino students in an after-school program affected their self-efficacy and intrinsic motivation in school. Niehaus et al. (2012) noticed that although self-efficacy in Latino students remained the same throughout the school year and was not affected by the after-school program, self-efficacy did contribute to higher scores on standardized tests and general academic success. Students with higher levels of self-efficacy also had better school attendance. Niehaus et al. (2012) believe that this shows the

necessity of developing a sense of self-worth and confidence in Latino students, as it ultimately leads to greater successes.

Self-efficacy was not an indicator of high GPA, although intrinsic motivation was, Niehaus et al. (2012) found. Latino students who were intrinsically motivated were more successful in the classroom, although intrinsic motivation did not affect standardized test scores. Niehaus et al. (2012) believe this is because students were more likely to have positive academic behaviors such as turning in work on time and goals to attend higher education, and this would not necessarily show on standardized test results. Intrinsic motivation did not seem to be connected to attendance in an after-school program.

One thing that the after-school program did impact was students' math scores on standardized tests. Niehaus et al. (2012) found that Latino students who did attend the after-school program received higher scores on their standardized math tests at the end of the year. The after-school program did focus on math through games and skill-building exercises and individual tutoring.

Niehaus et al. (2012) ultimately found that Latino student participation in an after-school program could benefit academic progress. It is especially important to find ways to help Latino students achieve academic success as there is a risk of academic failure for this ever-increasing student population.

Underrepresentation of Latino Students in Advanced Classes

One way Latino students can find success is by taking advanced courses. Walker and Pearsall (2012) looked at the underrepresentation of Latino students in Advanced Placement (AP) classes. Teachers, students and parents described AP classes as unwelcoming to Latino students because of their lack of diversity. Walker and Pearsall (2012) also observed a reluctance

among Latino students to perform at a higher level than their family members as they felt this was a sign of disrespect. Walker and Pearsall (2012) noted the lack of policies that recognize cultural differences, and the normalizing of white student behaviors and cultural attitudes. Additionally, non-English speaking families were unable to make their voices heard because of lack of support.

Walker and Pearsall (2012) found that many students and parents did not think AP classes were worth the effort because they did not see college as a viable option. Some participants noted the challenges immigrant students face in attending or enrolling in college, such as residency requirements and tuition costs. These factors made students unsure that college was a good path forward.

Walker and Pearsall (2012) found that many students saw teacher and school support as a factor in enrolling for AP classes. This connects to the necessity of multicultural outreach and understanding for teachers of diverse students. Walker and Pearsall (2012) stressed the importance of communication and community building as a way to motivate and encourage students of multicultural backgrounds.

Walker and Pearsall (2012) believe that educators can take on cultural competency courses to improve these issues but that ultimately, society as a whole is a major influence in how Latino students perceive and are perceived in school. The major links to Latino underrepresentation are family and peer factors, isolation, a lack of support from educators and a feeling of being othered or undervalued as a minority. Walker and Pearsall (2012) found that educators need to consider social factors and be able to have challenging discussions in order to identify and ameliorate issues stemming from cultural differences in school. Many educators shy away from these discussions which only harms progress.

Witenko, Mireles-Rios and Rios (2017) studied the levels of enrollment of Latino students in Advanced Placement classes, specifically who was encouraging these students to take these classes. Witenko et al. (2017) compared encouragement of white students and Latino students and found that both groups were mostly encouraged by their parents or guardians, although white students received encouragement at a higher rate. One reason for this may be because the majority of Latino students Witenko et al. (2017) studied had parents with low levels of education. Parents who do not have higher education levels often do not have information about educational institutions and may not be aware that AP classes exist.

Witenko et al. (2017) found that white students were more likely to receive encouragement from teachers than Latino students. Witenko et al. (2017) believe this is because teachers could be falling into racial biases and stereotypes and are therefore not supporting Latino students. The majority of AP class enrollment is white students and teachers may be subconsciously believing that Latino students do not belong in AP classes. Witenko et al. (2017) stressed the importance of teachers recognizing these internal biases.

Latino students were less likely to be influenced by peers to enroll in AP classes, as opposed to white students. Witenko et al. (2017) concluded that because there are fewer Latino students in AP courses to begin with, they are less likely to promote these courses among their peers, simply because they do not have access to advanced classes.

Witenko et al. (2017) found one place where Latino students received more encouragement than white students. This was through extended sources of support, such as: school counselors, club advisors and teachers from programs outside of school. Latino students may be more likely to have strong connections to their community or are more likely to seek out other sources of support, since there may not be much encouragement in their schools.

Muller, Riegle-Crumb, Schiller, Wilkinson, and Frank (2010) worked to determine if educational opportunities are offered equally to students of different racial or ethnic backgrounds. Although Latino students have been attending schools in the United States for several generations now, there is a major growth in this student population which makes it apparent that there is still segregation in schools, and it is not just an issue of black and white students (Muller et al., 2010).

Muller et al. (2010) found that Latino students are generally underrepresented in advanced courses in high school, although the amount of underrepresentation varies throughout the nation. Muller et al. (2010) determined that this inequality is connected to social class or academic preparation. This lack of academic opportunity for Latino students leads to repercussions that follow the student for the rest of their academic experience. Because Latino students are underrepresented in advanced classes, their GPAs and college enrollment levels are lower. According to Muller et al. (2010), this is because students do not receive educational support early on in their school experience. There is a lack of academic preparation among this group of students which affects their early performance in school. Muller et al. (2010) noticed that the placement of a student in their sophomore year of high school greatly influences their success in later high school and enrollment in advanced courses. The way in which schools place their students in different level courses affects the level of racial inequality a student might receive (Muller et al., 2010).

Muller et al. (2010) also looked at factors that increase the achievement gap for minority students. During high school, the gap increases significantly. Mueller et al. (2010) believe that peer influences, stereotypes, experiences of oppression and practices of school staff all contribute to this widened gap.

Overall, Muller et al. (2010) found that schools play a huge role in racial and ethnic inequality. It is necessary that the school itself finds ways to allow students social mobility and a way to overcome inequalities in education.

Teacher Training

In order to address these inequalities, schools should invest in teacher training programs that allow educators to recognize and work with student diversity. Diversity trainings can focus on a specific cultural group, such as Latino students, and give teachers an opportunity to confront their own biases and develop curriculum and teaching techniques that reaches these students.

Chapman and Hall (2016) assessed the effectiveness of the *Yo Veo* program, a program that gives teachers cultural training on working with Latino students. After evaluating two schools in their study, Chapman and Hall (2016) found that the majority of teachers at the first school improved their skills and understanding of cultural competency. This increase in understanding occurred immediately after the training and was again observed nine months after the training, thanks to practical experience. The second school studied showed significant improvement on teachers' attitudes towards undocumented immigrants. The attitude improvement was apparent immediately after the training. Unlike School 1, however, the improvements gained in School 2 were not maintained nine months after the initial training.

Chapman and Hall (2016) attribute these differences in opinion to the makeup and background of each school. They believe that the makeup of students at each school contributed to the results. The majority of students at School 1 were Latino, while Latino students were a minority at School 2. Teachers may have been less invested in the training of Latino students at School 2 simply because they felt it would not apply to the majority of their students. School 2 also had higher reading and math proficiencies. Chapman and Hall (2016) believe that this might

have led teachers to believe that they did not need to focus on a group of students because their students overall were performing at higher levels.

Because teachers will continue to work with diverse student populations, Chapman and Hall (2016) note the importance of understanding different communities, combating institutional racism and being able to engage in difficult conversations. Chapman and Hall (2016) found that the usage of programs such as *Yo Veo* is effective in changing attitudes and ignorance in teachers of diverse students. Teachers must be willing to work with diverse students and improve their understanding of cultural differences in order for these programs to be successful. Teachers who were able to put the things they learned immediately into practice were the most successful at using culturally competent practices.

While *Yo Veo* was generally successful, there are many other training methods that help teachers gain cultural awareness. Collins, Duyar, and Pearson (2016) focused on the cultural intelligence levels (CQ) and multicultural exposures (such as traveling to other countries or speaking more than one language) of teachers and principals; and if these levels correlated to Latino student achievement.

Collins et al. (2016) found that the CQ levels of principals affected Latino achievement in eighth grade math and language arts. Principals were more effective than teachers in this case. This could be because principals can influence the environment for the entire school. Collins et al. (2016) found that the measurement of teachers' CQ levels did not have any direct impact on their Latino students.

While Collins et al. (2016) did not find teachers' CQ levels significant, they did find that their levels of multicultural exposure influenced the achievement of Latino students. Collins et al. (2016) noted that teachers' experience travelling abroad was particularly important in their

impact on students. Teachers who had the opportunity to visit different countries for pleasure (not for work) were more effective in helping Latino students become more successful in their classrooms. Collins et al. (2016) noted that international travel helped individuals have successful interactions with culturally diverse people. While travelling, people gain skills, behaviors and knowledge that allow them to adapt to culturally unique situations.

Collins et al. (2016) found that while CQ levels did not have a major effect for teachers, their exposure to multicultural experiences was extremely important. They suggest teachers find ways to increase their exposure to varied cultures as the population of minority students, specifically Latinos, grows in the United States. It is important that schools hire teachers and principals who are ready to meet the needs of diverse student populations. Collins et al. (2016) believe that educators who are able to successfully address the needs of Latino students will be able to narrow educational gaps in performance by becoming role models and having high expectations for all learners.

One way teachers can expand their cultural awareness is by completing a training program internationally. Teachers can increase understanding of their Latino students' cultural background and learn about culture by putting themselves in their ELL students' shoes. Butvilofsky, Escamilla, Soltero-González, and Aragon (2012) looked at the effect of an international learning experience for teachers of ELL students. These teachers, some with knowledge of Spanish, some without, spent three weeks in Central Mexico gaining experience as language learners. They were asked to address writing prompts in Spanish, despite their level of understanding.

Butvilofsky et al. (2012) found that many teachers had emotional responses to these tasks, such as discomfort, fear, confusion and anxiety. Some teachers experienced physical

reactions and were in general extremely stressed. These feelings promoted empathy towards their

ELL students. The teachers also used several different strategies to achieve the task, such as

looking for cognates, gestures, prior knowledge and educational schemas, and looking around to

take prompts from their peers' behaviors. This gave teachers an understanding of how their ELL

students complete daily classroom tasks. Teachers took these lessons to heart and thought of

their own practices with ELL students and how they could be improved upon.

Butvilofsky et al. (2012) stress the importance of giving teachers experiences that can put

them in the place of English language learners. Through this program in Mexico, teachers were

able to practice firsthand the emotions and skills ELL students go through. They then found ways

to apply it to their own teaching.

Another important aspect Butvilofsky et al. (2012) saw teachers realize was the usage of

native language to complete classroom assignments. Many teachers in Butvilofsky's et al. (2012)

study asked if they could complete the assignment in English instead of Spanish. This allowed

teachers to realize the importance of content as a way to show mastery. Teachers were more

open to giving their ELL students the option of writing in their native language. Butvilofsky et

al. (2012) agree that this is beneficial in showing what a student learns and reducing their overall

stress in a second-language classroom.

Teachers must be able to recognize ethnic, racial and cultural differences before they can

begin to address them in their classroom. Anhalt and Rodriguez Perez (2013) looked at teachers'

concerns and preparedness when teaching students from diverse populations. They found that

teachers with 0-7 years of teaching experience were less likely to be concerned with social

issues. New teachers may not be aware of social issues in their classrooms and how these issues

impact their students. Because they may have not yet experienced direct effects of social issues

among their students, they may consider it an issue that must be dealt with in society in general as opposed to in school. They may not see the connections of social concerns to their school. Anhualt and Rodriguez Perez (2013) believe that since new teachers tend to be young, they have not developed an understanding of social issues and do not recognize the differences among treatment of culturally diverse students.

Anhalt and Rodriguez Perez (2013) discovered that many of their participants did not find self-concerns about social issues important. Self-concerns describe teachers' fears about successfully dealing with social issues like racism and discrimination. Anhalt and Rodriguez Perez (2013) felt that the lack of concern on social issues could mean that teachers' perceptions are not biased by prejudiced labels. Because of this, they might not believe that Latino students struggle with academic success. Another reason for these low self-concerns could be because teachers find they have strong personal connections with their students and therefore there could not be any social problems in their classrooms.

Overall, Anhalt and Rodriguez Perez (2013) found that teacher ethnicity is an important variable to consider when looking at teacher's concerns on diversity. They discovered that non-Hispanic/Latino teachers were more concerned with social issues than Hispanic/Latino teachers. This could be because non-Hispanic/Latino teachers felt that they were cultural strangers to their Latino students or that they had fears of being accused of discrimination or being biased against their Latino students. Anhalt and Rodriguez Perez (2013) believe that teachers who have a similar cultural background to their students are less likely to be concerned with how their students perceive their teachers' identities.

Successful Teachers

With effective training, teachers can develop successful methods to engage their diverse student population. Albers and Frederick (2013) studied two Latino teachers who were successful literacy teachers to Latino ninth-graders. Albers and Frederick (2013) attributed much of these teachers' successes to their collaboration on lesson planning. Albers and Frederick (2013) believe that teachers who hold similar ideas on social justice are able to transform their teaching. Both participants were from similar backgrounds which ultimately influenced their understanding and ideas of pedagogy and curriculum design. Not only were these teachers able to collaborate on their work, they also gave plenty of opportunities for their students to collaborate. Students used various forms of technology to collaboratively create interpretations of their in-class readings.

Albers and Frederick (2013) noted that these teachers were outstanding because they moved beyond the standards held by the state and curriculum. They looked at their own life stories and the lives of their students and made connections to their assignments through personal histories. Moving beyond the mandated curriculum let these teachers have challenging conversations with their students and engage in the realities of the world through literature. Through their lessons, they gave students a choice in their projects and allowed them to play to their strengths. Students were able to present their own opinions and views on the literature in class and were not punished or labelled as incorrect for their interpretations. Albers and Frederick (2013) concluded that teachers should allow their students to tackle difficult, yet real, issues in their everyday lives, such as: poverty, racism and gangs. When teachers do not delve into these topics, students (particularly Latino students living in poor communities) feel ashamed or unable to navigate their realities. If these topics are continuously considered off-limits in

school curriculum, Latino students often do not feel they have a chance to have authentic, critical discussions.

Flores-Dueñas (2005) also observed an exemplary first grade teacher, La Maestra Miriam, and found similar successful techniques. This teacher was from Mexico and taught Latino students in a classroom that was set up to be 90% in Spanish and 10% in English. Students were successful in this classroom when they were asked to write about their personal lives and daily experiences. La Maestra Miriam encouraged students to share their own stories as she also shared her stories. Flores-Dueñas (2005) found this collaborative environment to be extremely effective, students felt that La Maestra Miriam had just as much to learn from them, as they did from her. Students felt equally important to their teacher.

Additionally, Flores-Dueñas (2005) saw that La Maestra Miriam used student life experiences to build community in the classroom. A community-based classroom was key to establishing a collaborative learning environment. Students felt comfortable working with one another. La Maestra Miriam set up literacy clubs within the classroom that included shared readings and routine to engage students.

Flores-Dueñas (2005) found that one expectation La Maestra Miriam had for her students was that they answer each other's questions. Flores-Dueñas (2005) found that Miriam never answered her own questions and allowed for students to collaborate to discover the answer for themselves. La Maestra Miriam also asked mostly higher-level questions to her students. Flores-Dueñas (2005) found that these students responded well to meaningful assignments and were expected to think hard and exchange ideas.

Flores-Dueñas (2005) ultimately concluded that by giving Spanish-speaking students a strong foundation of literacy skills in Spanish, they were able to successfully gain literacy skills

in English later on. This development of their native language allowed students to make connections and form critical thinking without having to struggle with simultaneous second language acquisition.

Sosa and Gomez (2012) found that teachers with a high sense of efficacy were better able to support Latino students. Teachers with high efficacy are confident in their skills and know their strengths as a teacher. They generally have higher expectations for their students and believe that all students, regardless of ethnicity, language skills and background, are able to be successful in the classroom.

The teachers Sosa and Gomez (2012) studied were tolerant of Latino students using Spanish in the classroom and made modifications throughout their lessons to help English language learners. Sosa and Gomez (2012) also noted these successful teachers were aware of and understanding to the specific needs and stressors Latino students encounter in their daily lives, such as immigration status. They were able to help students see beyond stereotypes.

Sosa and Gomez (2012) found that teachers with a high level of efficacy often transfer this to their students. These students are able to discover their own capabilities and strengths and ultimately are able to see how they can be successful. Sosa and Gomez (2012) point out that this confidence building is especially important for Latino students, who are often feel a focus on their lack of achievement from school. Sosa and Gomez (2012) believe that an increase in teacher efficacy will help Latino students feel more successful. They recommend teacher preparation programs focus on this connection. New teacher programs should address the stereotypes and beliefs that bias perception of Latino and other students.

Sosa and Gomez (2012) also recommend higher expectations for student achievement not only in the classroom, but also in the entire school. For this, administrators need to support

coaching and peer connections among teachers and provide professional development that address high student expectations.

Riconscente (2014) was also interested in how teachers could influence Latino students' interest, self-efficacy and achievement in math classes. This study showed that teacher practices were a dominant role in helping their students' motivation and achievement. One important influence teachers had on their Latino students was their demonstration of care. Students could perceive how much a teacher cared about both them and the subject matter. Riconscente (2014) found that the more students perceived that their teachers cared, the more their self-efficacy increased. This study showed that the perception of caring was especially significant for Latino student achievement. Riconscente (2014) believes that the relationships teachers build with their students is an imperative aspect in showing that they care about their students, ultimately increasing Latino students' confidence in the classroom.

Riconscente (2014) believes that the teacher's role can strongly contribute to the success of Latino students by increasing their interest in the subject matter. One key practice for teachers is the ability to explain the subject (in this case mathematics). Latino students who found that their teachers were strong at presenting concepts were more likely to succeed in class and became more interested in the lessons. Riconscente (2014) found that Latino students who did not initially have an interest in mathematics could develop such an interest due to a successful teacher. This shows that teaching ability is extremely important in cultivating student engagement, especially among minority groups, such as Latinos.

Conclusion

It is clear from the research that Latino students face a variety of challenges during their educational experience. Benner and Graham (2011), Quiroz (1997), Bell et al. (2019), and

Heredia Jr. et al. (2017) studied the discrimination that Latino students receive throughout their school career. Often the classroom culture was not approachable to Latino students and caused feelings of isolation and defeatism (Bell et al., 2019; Heredia Jr. et al., 2017).

Teachers can help facilitate a more welcoming classroom environment to combat these feelings. Irizarry (2007), Irizarry and Raible (2011), Lo et al. (2015), Ordoñez-Jasis et al. (2016), and López (2016) found that culturally responsive teaching methods were crucial in engaging Latino students. These studies showed that teachers who developed an understanding of their students' cultural heritage and sought ways to connect their material to these cultures were better able to motivate their students.

Along with cultural connections, linguistic understanding can help Latino students achieve. Babino and Stewart (2017), Brooke-Garza (2015), de la Luz Reyes (2012), Escamilla et al. (2005), Kolano et al. (2012), and Soto Huerta (2017) researched the role of bilingualism in Latino students. Many Latino students speak Spanish as their first language. Although some Latino students speak English as their first language, Escamilla et al. (2005) concluded that the presence of Spanish in their learning process was beneficial as it is a cultural connection. Indeed, most of the research found that language and culture are inseparable.

There are other school-wide changes that benefit Latino schools, in addition to the promotion of bilingualism. Latunde (2017), and Becerra (2012) studied the importance of increasing Latino family engagement. Parents are an important resource and source of support but there is a lack of involvement among Latino families. Researchers found that this was because the schools studied did not communicate effectively with parents, especially if they did not speak English (Latunde, 2017). These schools needed to make sure they understood the cultural differences among Latino families so that they could reach out more effectively

(Becerra, 2012). Curwen and Colon-Muñiz (2013), and Niehaus et al. (2012) studied the importance of an after-school program. Both studies concluded that after-school programs were beneficial to Latino students as they increased student motivation (Niehaus et al., 2012). However, these programs must be enriching and viewed as an extension of the school day in order to be effective (Curwen & Colon-Muñiz, 2013).

All of these challenges lead to underrepresentation of Latino students in advanced classes. Walker and Pearsall (2012), Witenko et al. (2017), and Muller et al. (2010) studied this low enrollment. They found that Latino students were often not aware of these opportunities because teachers were not encouraging them to sign up for advanced classes. Latino students also felt that these classes were irrelevant to them as they did not plan on continuing education after high school (Walker & Pearsall, 2012).

Finally, research shows that teachers and how they are trained can have a large impact on the success of Latino students. Chapman and Hall (2016), Collins et al. (2016), Butvilofsky et al. (2012), and Anhault and Rodriguez Perez (2013) studied the impact of teacher training. These studies found that the most successful trainings included a cultural component that gave educators a chance to experience some part of their students' cultures or communities. These trainings gave teachers a sense of empathy for their students (Butvilofsky et al., 2012). Teachers who were more empathetic were willing to make cultural connections within their lessons (Chapman & Hall, 2016). Albers and Frederick (2013), Flores-Dueñas (2005), Sosa and Gomez (2012), and Riconscente (2014) observed teachers who were especially effective at teaching Latino students. These studies noted that all the teachers had an understanding of their students' cultural backgrounds and even had experiences immersing themselves in these communities.

Teachers who made cultural connections were successful in allowing their students to achieve

(Sosa & Gomez, 2012).

CHAPTER III: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Summary of Literature

One of the fastest growing student populations in the United States today is Latino students (Witenko et al., 2017). Because of this rapid growth it is extremely important for educators to reach their diverse students. The needs of Latino students are obviously not being met in the classroom, as there is a significant achievement gap between Latino students and white students that only increases as students continue through school (Muller et al., 2010). Latino students face various forms of discrimination and stereotyping throughout their educational career which heavily impacts their achievement in school. These issues may be addressed with teacher intervention as they recognize and prevent biases within the classroom (Quiroz, 1997). Teacher training programs must take cultural differences into consideration so that teachers can effectively learn to not only decrease discrimination in the classroom, but also to engage culturally diverse learners. One notable aspect of Latino learners is that there is often a language component that affects their achievement. Many Latino students are native Spanish speakers who learn English as a second language. This may interfere with learning, generally because educators do not value Spanish as much as English and are unable to recognize contributions due to the language barrier.

One major obstacle to Latino achievement is the level of discrimination students perceive in the classroom. A study by Quiroz (1997) notes that as students continue through high school, the amount of discrimination they internalize increases. Throughout their school career, students develop a sense that they are not successful in the classroom because their needs are not being met. They give up any hope of success because the educational system has failed them many times before. Latino students feel disconnected from their classroom experiences because their

teachers are unable to motivate them. Latino students feel more motivated when they have racially or ethnically diverse teachers (Benner & Graham, 2011). Teacher diversity provides representation which can combat the feeling of exclusion.

While teacher diversity is an important factor in representation, teachers of any ethnicity can provide a meaningful learning experience for Latino learners. Many studies have found that culturally responsive teaching is an effective way to engage students from various backgrounds. Research shows that the most successful teachers were the ones who believed that their students' cultures and backgrounds contributed to the classroom and were something to be celebrated (Flores-Dueñas, 2005; Irizarry, 2007; López, 2016). By allowing students to make connections from their cultural experiences to the subject, students become more engaged and successful in the classroom. They feel a part of the educational process and that their ideas and experiences are valid learning tools (Irizarry & Raible, 2011).

One way for teachers to respect their Latino students is to understand that their language skills are an important aspect of their culture (Brooke-Garza, 2015). Latino students who are bilingual should be able to practice their language skills in both Spanish and English. Allowing students to express themselves in whatever language makes them comfortable allows them to show comprehension and mastery of learning targets without the stress of perfecting their language (Brooke-Garza, 2015; de la Luz Reyes, 2012; Soto Huerta, 2017). Bilingual and dual-language immersion programs are key to allowing bilingual Latinos achieve academically.

In addition to accommodating bilingual students, educators must acknowledge family support as a way to increase the success of Latino students. Because many Latino families are Spanish speakers, schools and teachers must make sure that there are translations of flyers, letters and other forms of communications sent home (Latunde, 2017). Cultural understanding is key in

communicating and engaging Latino families as well. Many concerned Latino families feel uncomfortable contacting teachers as culturally they view them as experts and authorities (Becerra, 2012). Educators must make a greater effort to reach out to families of their Latino students. Because families are a large system of support for young Latinos, they can be a vital resource in engaging and encouraging their students. This will help students become more successful in school.

Another change schools can make to improve Latino achievement is to implement an after-school enrichment program. Research shows that student motivation and standardized test scores increase when involved in an after-school program (Curwen & Colon-Muñiz, 2013; Niehaus et al. 2012). These programs are more effective when they include quality enrichment of classroom learning as opposed to homework help or tutoring (Curwen & Colon-Muñiz, 2013). Latino students especially benefit from an expanded learning day as it gives them a chance to reinforce the learning they acquired during the school day.

Enrichment programs will help Latino learners achieve and progress. One area in which these students are largely underrepresented is advanced courses. Because the needs of Latino students are not being met early in their educational experience, they do not feel comfortable enrolling in advanced classes. According to Walker and Pearsall (2012), these classes often have a Eurocentric bias and Latinos do not feel represented. Latino students are also generally unaware of these classes as many teachers and educators do not encourage them to enroll (Walker & Pearsall, 2012; Witenko et al., 2017). The general discrimination and lack of representation that Latino students face throughout their school careers leads them to believe that they are not capable of advanced coursework.

Research shows that teachers are one of the best ways to combat this underrepresentation and lack of achievement. Successful teaching starts with successful trainings and professional development. Teachers can learn specific techniques to engage and motivate their Latino students. Diversity trainings that allow teachers to empathize with their Latino students are some of the most effective methods (Butvilofsky et al. 2012; Chapman & Hall, 2016). Teachers who understand the challenges their Latino students face are more likely to teach in ways that meet their needs. Teachers can use this knowledge to show care and build confidence in their students (Riconscente, 2014). Students who feel more confident and valued are more likely to engage in the classroom and achieve academically.

Professional Application

It is necessary that many changes take place for Latino students to feel more welcome and successful in school. Many improvements can come from the district, school and individual classroom. Teachers play a huge role in supporting Latino students and can benefit from professional development to bring awareness and reflection to their practice.

Teachers can apply culturally responsive methods to engage their Latino learners. They can set up a classroom environment in which all students feel comfortable contributing. Instead of forcing students to conform to a cultural norm decided by the teacher, students and teachers should make an agreement on the tone of the classroom and the modes of communication (Irizarry, 2007). Each student can then bring their own unique perspective and add it to the entire classroom culture. With the classroom environment in place, teachers can then find ways to culturally connect their curriculum to their students' backgrounds (López, 2016; Ordoñez-Jasis, 2016). Above all, educators should be empathetic and show their students that they care for them and respect them, whatever their background (Riconscente, 2014). It is necessary for teachers to

learn about their students' cultures in order to gain an understanding of how to connect their lessons culturally. Teachers who find opportunities to engage with Latino communities or even try to learn Spanish are more successful at creating culturally relevant classes (Irizarry & Raible, 2011; Collins et al., 2016).

Teachers can help diverse students with encouragement as well as cultural comprehension. Latino students are generally underrepresented in challenging and advanced courses, often because their prior educational experiences have caused them to internalize messages that they are not good enough (Quiroz, 1997). Latino students receive this message because school is still a Eurocentric setting and not enough teachers employ culturally responsive pedagogy. The research makes it clear that teacher support and encouragement is imperative in lifting up Latino students (Witenko et al., 2017). Many Latino students are not encouraged by their teachers to enroll in challenging classes. Educators must be aware of this lack of support and turn their focus to minority students when presenting opportunities for achievement (Walker & Pearsall, 2012).

An additional form of support for Latino students comes from their families. In order to help families encourage their students, the school must provide communication. There is a lack of Latino parental involvement in schools. In order to increase this involvement, schools need to make certain that they are reaching out to diverse families (Becerra, 2012). This is another instance where cultural comprehension is important. Schools and educators need to become familiar with the communities their students come from so that they know the best ways to communicate with them and support them (Latunde, 2017).

Research shows that bilingual classrooms are especially important in engaging Latino learners. Students need to feel comfortable interacting with each other and their teachers in

school and that comes from effective communication (Kolano et al., 2012). If students are unable to communicate orally, they are not going to be able to show their understanding or mastery of a concept. There are two major ways of promoting bilingualism in schools. The first is two-way bilingual immersion which brings native English speakers together with native Spanish speakers and allows both student groups to learn each language through immersion. The second method is bilingual classrooms where all students are native Spanish speakers learning English. In each of these cases instruction is in both languages. Either method allows students to choose to express themselves in whichever language they feel most confident and students often interact in both languages to accomplish different tasks (Soto Huerta, 2017). Bilingualism in the classroom helps Latino students navigate their cultures and promotes diversity. Bilingual teachers should be sure that they place equal value on both languages and emphasize the importance of diversity (de la Luz Reyes, 2012).

Limitations of the Research

There were several limitations within the research. Many of the studies had small sample sizes (Becerra, 2012; Chapman & Hall, 2016). The number of participants was limited and usually within a single classroom, academic subject, school or district and could not be used as a generalization for other areas of the United States. The research was also limited in length of the studies. The majority of studies were performed within a single school year. This did not give researchers enough time to discover the further implications of their results (Collins et al., 2016). Of the studies that did extend beyond the school year (Benner & Graham 2011; Quiroz, 1997), there was not an opportunity for close observation throughout those years, but rather a one-time follow up survey.

None of the studies took into account differences in heritage within the Latino population. Benner and Graham (2011) note that Latinos are not a homogenized group of people. They come from different countries, have different immigration experiences and varied levels of acculturation. Much of the research did not take these differences into account and instead focused on the entire Latino population.

Implications for Further Research

Because Latino students can come from a larger variety of backgrounds, countries and experiences, further research should take time to compare these differences. One aspect of heritage differences that could be expanded is the level of discrimination within Latino groups. That is: do different nationalities and backgrounds within the Latino community experience different levels of discrimination or academic achievement? (Benner & Graham 2011).

Further research should not only take into account the varied backgrounds of students, but also the ethnicity of teachers (Anhault & Rodriguez Perez, 2013; Butvilofsky et al. 2012). Current research does not place much emphasis on how the race and ethnicity of a teacher impacts specifically Latino students. Other teaching variables such as teacher performance in regard to Latino students' achievement should be studied further.

Finally, future research should expand sample sizes and study length in order to broaden the results so that they may include more locations in the United States, school districts, teachers and students. Because most of the research focused on a small sample size (one school or one classroom), there is not an accurate understanding of the entire student population (Chapman & Hall, 2016).

Conclusion

There are many factors that can affect Latino students in the classroom, from discrimination to lack of support. Students often feel that they are unwelcome or that they are "othered" by classmates or school staff (Quiroz, 1997). This sense of discrimination can lead to underrepresentation in advanced classes and an educational gap between Latinos and white students. Latino students may not be aware that they have the capabilities to achieve in academically rigorous classes because they face these challenges of bias in the classroom (Walker & Pearsall, 2012). There is also a lack of parental support among Latinos, again caused by biases from the school (Becerra, 2012). Educators are not aware of linguistic and cultural differences that hold families back from connecting with their child's school. All of these challenges can be addressed by teachers and schools. Many Latino students are bilingual Spanish and English speakers. Educators can embrace these language skills and allow students (and their families) to use either language that makes them comfortable. This reinforces student understanding and allows non-native speakers to show their comprehension of a topic without the fear of making a mistake in a language in which they are not fully confident.

Teachers are a major resource in lessening gaps and challenges in the classroom (Butvilofsky et al., 2012). There are a variety of trainings that allow teachers to develop their understanding of student diversity. Culturally responsive training is one of the most effective ways to engage Latinos in the classroom. Allowing students to engage in lessons through their own cultural lenses encourages and motivates them, improving achievement. Teachers who view diverse students as cultural resources and someone they can learn from are successful in culturally responsive teaching (López, 2016). Latino students succeed when teachers do not insist they conform to a cultural norm, but instead let them bring their own perspectives and

values into the class. It is necessary for teachers to engage in the communities and cultures of their students as well. The more cultural awareness an educator has, the more willing they are to learn and interact with their diverse students.

As the United States becomes increasingly more diverse, educators must be conscious of the variety of challenges and needs their students will bring into the classroom. We must be willing to understand their rich backgrounds and teach in ways that allow them to thrive.

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