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How Latinx Students Experience a High School English Class in a Monolingual School District

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Monolingual School District
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DEDICATION

To Hannah Eliasoph, you are my spark, my light, my inspiration, my guide, my teacher; each day you enlighten me and make me smile. To Vivien Eliasoph Judson, you have edified me in ways I never expected, teaching me to never give up pursuing worthwhile endeavors. You taught me the wisdom of perseverance and patience. To Mark Orgel, you are not last sweetheart, you are foremost. You have the patience of the biblical Job and the wisdom of Solomon. I am beyond grateful for our enduring chapters.

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ABSTRACT

In an effort to address the needs of the fastest growing population at my school, I asked Latinx students to share their experiences of being in a monolingual English 2 classroom. Students also shared opinions about friendships, Latinx culture in school, and alternative methods of educating non-English speakers.

Through action research we can assess the exigencies of Latinx learners. Further study is needed to determine evolving needs and best practices for increasing the academic achievement for this population. Some possible solutions to Latinx students falling behind their hegemonic peers include incorporating Latinx culture in curriculum and school culture, as well as dual language instruction.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AccE .... Accidental Ethnography

EL .... English Learner

ELA .... English Language Arts

ELL .... English Language Learner

IES .... Institute for Education Sciences

TWI .... Two Way Immersion

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Many of us remember what it was like to enter high school; we knew the mixed emotions of excitement and fear as we plunged into the next level of secondary education. Imagine what it would have been like if your circumstances were different. Imagine being a modern-day high school student who goes to your first English class and the teacher hands out the syllabus which you peruse to see which works and authors you will be reading. You see *Romeo and Juliet* by William Shakespeare, *Catcher in the Rye* by J.D. Salinger, and *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald. These works have much in common: they are often read in high school English classes; they are regarded as highly important works for educated people to be familiar with; and they feature privileged, Anglo-centric characters; (Merrill, 2017). White students may see themselves or their ancestors reflected in these works, Latinx students most likely will not.

My Latinx students are a combination of native speakers of English whose families have been in the United States for one or more generations and newer immigrants who will learn English during their time in the United States. Those who attend without any knowledge of English may wonder how they will fit into a new school. Will there be anyone to talk to, to ask questions of? When I assign work, I see non-English speakers watch their classmates as they write in notebooks or open laptops.

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Often there is no one in the room who speaks Spanish, so these students are left to watch for visual cues about what they are supposed to be doing. These students are alone with their thoughts and those thoughts are in Spanish. When they open the textbook, the pictures they see are of White people dressed in Elizabethan or roaring 20s attire, or in the case of Holden Caulfield, in a red flannel hunting cap. They do not see brown skin, or people who look like them. They see people representing the dominant culture, a club they are not members of; they are excluded.

Those who are new to the United States, may have had a perilous journey. This is the situation for tens of thousands of children who come to the U.S. each year (Baugh, 2019). Some are fleeing untenable living conditions, others simply come to be with family or enjoy a better life. When migrant students arrive in the U.S. they are expected to acclimate to their new environment (Understanding Immigrant Trauma, the Immigrant Learning Center, 2020). Being put in a classroom in which they do not understand what is being said lacks justification and is not valid acculturation or instruction (Abedi et al., 2020).

The need for dual language instruction in schools is undeniable yet is not implemented universally in K-12 education in the United States (Steele et al., 2017). Some may argue that it would not be fair to non-Spanish speaking immigrants if schools embraced a dual Spanish-English curriculum. It is true that this would not benefit those who come to the United States not knowing Spanish or English (Granle, 2022), but the evidence that the need for dual education in Spanish cannot be disputed. Research from the Pew organization says that not only are Spanish speaking immigrants the United States' current number one subgroup of newcomers, but the forecast is for this trend to

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grow (Budiman et al., 2021). With the need so apparent, and the results so positive where dual language is the norm (Steele et al., 2017), it begs the question of why dual language education is not available in many more districts, including my own.

Some possible reasons to focus education on Anglo-centric texts and deny dual-language education could include that the majority of native-born United States citizens are not of Latinx descent (Jones et al., 2021) and therefore believe that because there was not a dual language program offered to their ancestors, it is unfair to offer such a program to current immigrants (English & Immigration, n.d.). I understand this from the perspective of a person whose own parents were immigrants from Europe with no dual language option available to them. However, if the objective for immigrants and other Latinx students in the United States is to be tax-paying earners and voters with the full rights and privileges of all Americans, the path to this will be quicker if students are given every opportunity to succeed in school. Districts engaged in dual language education report positive outcomes (Williams, 2018), so it is bewildering that all districts are not embracing the practice.

There is no denying that prejudices toward people of color exist, and this also may be one of the reasons dual language education is not universally implemented. Furthermore, Anglo-centric literature dominates standardized tests (Skerrett, 2009) thereby guiding teaching practices; practices which reflect the test framework of dominant-culture curriculum being the standard norm. Some may feel that mastering English is part of becoming an American citizen and mistakenly believe that English is our national language, but the United States has no official language (Learn about Life in the U.S., n.d.), so there is no legal reason why English should be considered more

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elevated than Spanish (Ek et al., 2013) aside from the fact that at this time, a command of Spanish will not help students whose education is entirely in English.

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2020 - 2021), my school currently serves 254 students who identify as Hispanic. Of the 1355 students currently enrolled, this accounts for about 18% of the student body enrollment; 18% of students who do not see themselves represented in textbooks, school community events, or in language. It is not surprising that some Latinx students may not feel welcome in United States classrooms (Samuel, 2020).

Problem of Practice

My problem of practice is that some Latinx students do not excel in my high school English classes and I seek to understand, and to the extent possible, mitigate factors which cause this group of students to underperform in class. Underperformance on standardized tests, class tests, quizzes, and essay scores could be the result of my more newly immigrated students not understanding or speaking English, a problem reflected in other parts of the nation (Arbelo-Marrero, 2016; Romero, 2017). These students sit in a class in which they do not understand their instructors or most of their peers unless someone in the room happens to be bilingual. It is unfair to the non-English speaking student to require them to sit in a class in which they cannot comprehend the instruction (Chabot, 2021). This only serves to make the student and teacher frustrated that, despite the quality of instruction, it is inaccessible for the learner (Clark-Gareca et al., 2020). I have had English Language Learners (ELLs) in my classes who sit patiently, listening but not understanding, waiting for the day when the words they do not comprehend, have meaning.

While it may not be easy to offer students instruction in all languages, it makes educational sense to allow newcomers who do not speak English, education in their native language. The Pew Research Center (2021) identified Spanish speakers to be our largest, and continually growing, group of newcomers (Budiman et al., 2021). Since there is evidence supporting the superiority of dual language teaching over monolingual instruction for a non-native speaker of English (Alvear, 2019; Dual Language Immersion, n.d.; Steele et al., 2019) including "improved performance on Standardized Tests: Immersion students perform as well as or better than non-immersion students on standardized tests of English and math administered in English" (Dual Language Immersion, n.d., sec. overview), it is clear that school districts which do not offer dual language instruction are not meeting the needs of some of their students. Marian et al. (2013) found that both minority-language and majority-language learners saw academic achievement gains when in a Two-Way Immersion (TWI) program compared to their single language instructed peers. I have to wonder if this lack of accommodation is the result of neglect or prejudice.

<div align="center">**Research Questions**</div>

The main question for research is: How do Latinx students experience a high school English class in a rural fringe (U.S. department of education, 2021, sec. School details) South Carolina district? A secondary question asks what can be done to increase academic performance for Latinx students.

Few would dispute that understanding and interpreting literature leads to a better understanding of the world around us. When high school students read *To Kill a Mockingbird,* they can learn lessons about the Jim Crow South, racial inequality,

stereotyping, how families' histories contribute to their understanding of who they are, the power of a child's voice, economic disparity, the value of education, tolerance, and a wealth of other lessons not as well personified when reading a history book. But students who cannot access the material, presented a book in a language they do not speak, read, or understand cannot comprehend the overarching themes or subtle nuances inherent in the material. They cannot follow the story, much less notice the many implicit details which contribute to the rich history associated with American classic literature. They are unable to participate in class discussions about these rich subtexts of the book, isolating them from the rest of the class.

I find my ELLs to be disengaged when we are immersed in the study of literature. While I can provide a translated version of a text, I cannot substitute the vibrant experience that comes from in-depth class conversations about the material, conversations which are in English. I have seen ELLs put their heads on their desks and wait patiently for the class period to be over. When delving into character analysis, recognizing an author's purpose, determining tone, recognizing synecdoche, or anachronisms; asking an ELL to keep pace with native speakers seems nothing short of a cruel practice of letting these students know they will not be as successful on tests as their English-speaking peers.

In using action research to help my students, I am giving ELLs a voice and ownership in their education. My methods included interviews, survey questions and observations. I sought to learn what it is like for ELLs to be in a class of English speakers, how they feel being in such a class, and what can be done to help them be better engaged in classroom discussions. Evidence from the study can lead to discovering which

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interventions may help my students the most. I also seek to discover what it might feel like to be an English speaking, Latinx student who is able to follow instruction, but does not see themself represented in the literature read in class.

Theoretical Framework

Merriam and Tisdell (2015) said "theoretical framework is the underlying structure, the scaffolding or frame" (p. 85) of a study. Cultural democracy (Adams & Goldbard, 1993) and critical pedagogy (Freire, P., 1970/2014) are the frameworks of my research. My school lacks a dual language education program, does not routinely address Latinx culture in literature, nor does it always recognize Latinx cultural events, holidays, or Hispanic heritage month. Each of these deficiencies demonstrates a lack of cultural democracy. My study gives voice to unheard Latinx students seeking to change the trajectory of Latinx academic achievement, making a critical pedagogy framework, through the lens of cultural democracy, applicable.

Cultural Democracy

The cultural democracy framework addresses the achievement gap (Leavitt & Hess, 2019) through the lens of equal access to curriculum and an equal opportunity for academic achievement. This study calls attention to the lack of equal access for Latinx students who do not see themselves in their academic texts and may have trouble accessing the curriculum due to language and lack of social capital, which Stanton-Salazar and Dornbusch (1995) described as relationships with "institutional agents" (p. 117), people with the ability to help students navigate educational institutions.

According to Adams and Goldbard (1995), "'cultural democracy'" stands for pluralism, participation, and equity in cultural life and cultural policy" (para.1, quotation

marks in original). Education is a core element of cultural life and policy. Rather than a *melting pot* mentality, cultural democracy "accepts and respects diversity as a strength to be preserved rather than a problem to be resolved" (para. 3). Latinx culture is rich in history and experiences, yet this is seldom reflected in English Language Arts instruction even though the Latinx population is the fastest growing subgroup of students in the United States (Bureau, 2021).

Critical Pedagogy

The very nature of my action research project subscribes to Freire's (1970/2014) idea that students are not receptacles for information but should have an alliance with educators to fulfill academic aspirations. Allin (2014) said "upon reflection, [I] realized that I had shown a lack of recognition of the students as collaborators" (p. 98). This point illustrates that at times, students are left out of the educational decision-making process. By engaging students in an action research study, we are collaborating with them. As a result, they can expect to benefit from the critical examination of how they are regarded in the educational setting. Freire (1970/2014) calls for oppressed people to be empirical in their efforts to gain equality through *"reflection* and *action* directed at the structures to be transformed" (p. 126, italics in original). It is up to Latinx students to facilitate changes which will serve them. Participant students had the opportunity to strengthen their critical thinking skills by focusing on topics they may not have previously considered but may be worth an investment of time and effort.

No one can tell one's story better than they can, and it is important for us, as researchers, to be sure that our students' voices dominate our findings. I know that by asking a student to participate in my study, I asked her to trust me to tell her story as she

sees it. Kennedy-Lewis et al. (2016) pointed out that researcher positionality cannot be ignored, saying they understood that "we have positioned ourselves as interpreters of the narratives of young people who differ from us racially and socioeconomically" (p. 10). They explain that interpretive biography is not about "an objectively accurate account of participants' lives" (p. 4) as it is about the perceived experience of the person whose story belongs to them. Latinx students speaking out about their personal experiences is the core of Freire's (1970/2014) critical pedagogy theory.

Cultural Democracy ties to Critical Pedagogy

Cultural democracy (Adams & Goldbard, 1995) intertwines with Freire's (1970/2014) critical pedagogy theory in the way disparities are identified and addressed. Freire (1970/2014) suggested that the path to equality must be forged by the oppressed. My study asks Latinx students to articulate their concerns about their education and points out inequities inherent in American education. Among the inequities faced by Latinx students are standardized academic tests based on dominant-culture literature (Choi, 2020; Skerrett, 2009). Choi's (2020) example is a standardized test question which uses the idiom "'key to the city'" (para. 5, quotation marks in original), a phrase his students were unfamiliar with. Both cultural democracy and critical pedagogy call for equity in the curriculum, including the ability to access education in an egalitarian manner.

Latinx heritage is rarely reflected in students' texts (David, 2019; Fernando, 2021; Rojas, 2010). Fernando (2021) said recent trends indicate books about Latinx characters have decreased from already low percentages. In addition to the lack of representation in texts, Latinx students needing instruction in Spanish will not find dual language

instruction universally available despite proven excellence (Alvear, 2019; Howard et al., 2005; Marian et al., 2013; Steele et al., 2017; Umansky et al., 2016; Williams, 2018). Alvear (2019) discovered that "ELL students' academics benefit most from increasingly additive programs that promote the fullest form of dual language proficiency" (p. 505). Furthermore, the culture of school leads to disinterest and high dropout rates for this subgroup of students (Arbelo-Marrero, 2016; Román, 2014). Arbelo-Marrero (2016) said schools "must rethink the sociocultural factors such as relationships, perceptions, language, customs, and values" (p. 184) to keep Latinx students engaged in academics.

Research Design

The Latinx student experience is not the same as the experience of other minorities or the hegemonic student population. Nor is the experience the same from one Latinx student to other Latinx students. Each young Latinx person brings with them circumstances which vary from English language learner (ELL) immigrant to those with family in the United States for multiple generations and with a superior command of English.

Qualitative Action Research with Ethnography Aspects

While elements of ethnography are visible in this study, the study conforms more to qualitative action research rather than the definition of ethnography. Merriam and Tisdell (2015) said

> the factor that unites all forms of ethnography is its focus on human society and culture. Although *culture* has been variously defined, it essentially refers to the beliefs, values, and attitudes that structure the behavior patterns of a specific group of people. (p. 29, italics in original)

Based on Merriam and Tisdell's (2015) definition, we can infer that Latinx students may have ideals which differ from their hegemonic peers. However, this study does not conform to the definition of ethnography since the *Sage Encyclopedia of Communication Research Methods* explained that "an ethnographer actively participates in the group in order to gain an insider's perspective of the group and to have experiences similar to the group members" (Kramer & Adams, 2017). I did not participate in student group activities. Notwithstanding this, the qualitative action research design permitted me to delve into the cultural uniqueness of the Latinx student and understand how their differences may contribute to their education.

My study is also participatory action research as defined by Efron and Ravid (2020) who said "participatory action research is social justice-oriented action research where researchers and school practitioners conduct collaborative inquiries that address problematic issues in school systems with the goal of changing them for the better" (p. 10). Rooted in participatory action research, this ethnographic study allowed me to pose questions to my Latinx students to best determine what they believe will help them excel in school. Efron and Ravid (2020) said action research is meant to improve student learning. My objective is to give Latinx students an equitable gateway to achieve the same level of academic success as their hegemonic peers. While this study was conducted at only one school, some of the findings may be applicable to other educational institutions, particularly those which like my school, have seen a dramatic increase in the number of Latinx students in recent years, or have reason to anticipate an influx of this population.

Qualitative and Quantitative Data

My study took place at a rural fringe (U.S. department of education, 2021, sec. School details) high school in South Carolina where I serve as an English teacher. Qualitative methodologies, as described by Efron and Ravid (2020), involved "observations, interviews, and rich narratives, enhance[d] the sensitivity of action researchers to the nuanced world of students and others in the school setting" (p. 12-13). I began with online survey questions and continued with interviews to understand how Latinx students experience a high school English class in my school. To better understand my participants' larger contexts, I examined quantitative data such as grades, scores, attendance, and discipline. But qualitative findings dominate the data analysis, making this a qualitative study (Creswell, 2015), particularly since I used observation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015) and accidental ethnography (AccE) (Fujii, 2015; Leavitt & Hess, 2019) to triangulate my findings.

The participants in my study were enrolled in a tenth-grade English class, or students who had recently completed the tenth-grade. As a tenth-grade teacher, I was able to build a convenience sample (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015) based on my familiarity with these students. The participants were identified in school records as "Hispanic," and identified themselves as either Hispanic, Latinx, Latino, Latina, Mexican, or originating from other Latin American countries, making my convenience sample also a purposeful sample (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The pool of potential participants was either native to the United States or born in another country; those who chose to participate were all U.S. born. Of the nine participants, only one had both parents born in the United States, all other participants had at least one parent born in another country. I sought participants

who I taught and maintained contact with. I attempted to seek out other students who qualified as participants through their enrollment in an ELL class, but none of the students from the ELL classes I visited chose to participate. Outside of ELL students, I did not seek out participants who I had not taught. I began recruitment of participants by verbally explaining my study and asking Latinx students if they would like to be involved. I followed up with interested students with a letter of invitation along with a consent/assent letter seeking parental or guardian permission for their student to participate.

In using a semi-structured interviewing process (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015), I had both structured and less rigid questions, some of which were open-ended to allow the participants' voices to be heard. I used my classroom to conduct interviews and pass out permission letters. Interviews were conducted in the classroom during my planning period, a time when students did not need to be in the room to give the participant as much privacy as possible while minimizing disrupting their schedules. Participants who were selected for interviews were able to find available time, often during their lunch period, to be interviewed without missing class time. Information was also gathered from hallway encounters and observations (Levitan et al., 2020). I mined quantitative data such as attendance, grades and tardies from my PowerSchool access. PowerSchool is the software my district employs to house grades, attendance, and demographic information about each student. I was also able to review emails which listed the names of students assigned disciplinary measures. Emails identified students who were assigned to serve in-school suspension (ISS), as well as those assigned out-of-school suspension (OSS). I then compared names on the list with our database, *Enrich (Frontline Education, 2023)* to

determine the race/ethnicity and gender of students assigned discipline. *Enrich (Frontline Education, 2023)* gave me access to students I do not currently teach. The lists of ISS and OSS students did not reveal a pattern for Latinx students and was not focused on in this qualitative study. I also employed a literature review to learn about previously published research on Latinx students and created surveys and interview questions to collect my data.

Observational Data from Outside of the Population

As a person without Latinx heritage, my perspective is "etic" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015, p. 30), as I observed and wrote about this experience with the lens of someone who is an outsider to the culture. It was important for me to earn the trust of participants and their families to attract Latinx students to my study. I know trust is built over time, so I sought to wait as long as possible in the term to see if students would be interested in participating, believing that greater exposure to me as a teacher would earn trust.

My participants explained what they saw, heard, and the emotions they encountered while in my English classroom. In addition to student reports, I relied on unstructured observations. Fujii (2015) said AccE is "paying systematic attention to the unplanned moments that take place outside an interview, survey or other structured methods" (p. 525). As an observer/researcher employing AccE, I noticed that a greater majority of Latinx students gravitate to other Latinx students for relationships. This includes romantic relationships, friendships, and casual acquaintance relationships, but seems to be particularly visible to me in romantic pairings of visibly heterosexual couples. This unintended observation occurred outside my classroom door when I, and other teachers, monitor our hallways during class changes. I have noticed fewer

intercultural relationships among Latinx students when compared to their peers who are not outwardly identifiable as Latinx. In addition to AccE, I explicitly asked participants about this phenomenon to compare my observations with their perceptions, a comparison which yielded confirmation. In another example of AccE, I recall a conversation about a Latinx male student who, with his red hair and freckles, presented as White. The discussion was about how his long-term Latinx girlfriend initially turned down his romantic overtures because she believed he was White. Once she determined he was Latinx, she consented to be his partner.

My study may or may not lead to intervention, but I believe it will demonstrate the need for additional studies on this growing subgroup of students. My study has the potential for my district to understand how to better serve the Latinx student population. I have observed a strong desire within my district to provide credit recovery for failing students, so the framework for assisting struggling students already exists but is not tailored to this subgroup's needs. It is possible that elements of my study may lead to policy changes which would assist Latinx students receiving a more equitable education with their non-Latinx peers.

Positionality: How I am Alike and Different from My Students

I am both an insider and an outsider (Herr & Anderson, 2015) in the study; an insider in that the participants were my students, but I am an outsider because I have a different background from the students I studied. As an insider, I share with my students our school culture and the geography of living within the same region of the United States.

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My differences as an outsider are numerous. I am a middle aged, white female, who grew up as a native English speaker in the United States with both of my parents being fluent in English. I have minimal working knowledge of Spanish, with English being my first and only fluent language.

I am Jewish and grew up in a working-class home as defined by sociologist Gilbert (2008) who said "low skill manual" (p. 13, fig. 1.1) workers fit into the American social category of working class, a job description which matched my father's occupation of landscape worker for the city of Los Angeles. My father finished high school and took night school classes throughout my childhood, including courses such as Spanish and Algebra. My mother was a full-time homemaker who did not finish high school because she took the responsibility of caring for her ailing mother. In terms of parental education and socio-economic status, I may have commonalities with some of my students. My family were conservative Jews, observing dietary restrictions in the home, but did not adhere to all orthodoxies. Aside from me, many of my students do not know Jewish people.

Both of my parents immigrated to the United States from eastern Europe in their youth. As the child of immigrants, I may have some insider status with some Latinx students who are also the children of immigrants, however, I present as White. I could not have experiences similar to those who present as Latinx, thus I am more of an outsider. As someone who presents as White, I had access to privileges associated with being White.

I was the youngest of three children with a 10 and 15 year age gap between myself and my two older brothers. I was born when my mother was 46 and my father was

55. I experienced embarrassment at my parents being mistaken for being my grandparents, and because our house was cosmetically unattractive when compared with the residences of my friends, this may or may not be something I have in common with some of my participants. Our home in suburban Los Angeles was under one thousand square feet with one bathroom, two bedrooms and one room-addition which served as a third bedroom. I believe I may have grown up in a home similar to some of my students who live in what Gilbert (2008) might describe as working-class neighborhoods.

I attended the public schools in my community and earned a bachelor's degree in journalism from San Diego State University. After many years in local broadcasting, I returned to school to earn a master's degree in curriculum and instruction from The University of Akron. I have taught in a Latinx-dominant school in an economically disadvantaged area in Ohio and currently teach in a rural-fringe (National center for educational statistics, 2021) high school in South Carolina.

Being the child of working-class, immigrant parents is something I may have in common with some of my student participants, potentially giving me a glimpse of insider status. It may also create some bias as I am inclined to believe in achievement through the portal of education. In addition, I had parents who, while not formally educated themselves, always encouraged me to attain as much education as I could. I grew up in an area with a significant Latinx community which may contribute to my desire to study this population.

Significance of the Study

The study merits investigation because of the growing population of Latinx students in both my district (*Data from 135th Day of School. [PowerSchool]*, 2023), and

the nation (Jones et al., 2021). The increase in population with a disparity of achievement (Arbelo-Marrero, 2016; Romero, 2017) means that schools must reevaluate how to best serve this population. If schools fail to meet the needs of the Latinx student community, the consequences could be dire for the nation as these students grow up and take their place in society as the next generation of taxpayers, heads of households, parents, voters, and community members.

Action research has the potential to enlighten us about problems which linger beneath the surface (Anderson et al., 2007); or are seemingly established, but unaddressed. The issues faced by Latinx students in my school seem to largely go unnoticed. The literature we read does not typically have a Latinx student focus, and components of Latinx culture such as holidays, language, and community structures are not always recognized. Casting a spotlight on this problem gives educators the opportunity to examine the situation for Latinx students through the lens of the population impacted, and may give policy makers in the district and in the state an opportunity to reevaluate how to best serve this population.

Because Latinx students have one of the highest rates of high school dropouts (Coe - Status Dropout Rates, 2021), it is apparent that current methods of education are not successful in this population. Unless Latinx students' educational needs are met, these students will not have the opportunity to seek higher education to secure jobs in well-paying professions. Those who opt to work rather than pursue higher education may not have acquired the skills they need to negotiate higher wages for themselves or ask for fair working conditions. They may also not be in a good position to start a business unless

they remediate the critical thinking skills they did not learn in high school. The very future of our nation depends on Latinx students being well educated.

Limitations of the Study

Because participants are restricted to those Latinx students in my convenience sample, the study may not reflect the opinions of education from all Latinx students nationwide, or even the experience of Latinx students at other schools in my district. The opinions of participants in my sample may not even reflect the experiences of other Latinx students in my school. Furthermore, my study does not include participants who do not possess a working knowledge of English. In addition, there may be policy and practice changes forthcoming in my district which I am not yet aware of.

I do not have a way of knowing whether the answers my participants provided are true reflections of their internal thoughts. I know that students may wish to participate for reasons external to the study's aim; motivations could include potential social time with me or seeking favor to secure a better grade. Students may have felt rushed when providing interview answers during my planning period and may not have included some ideas because they have other pressing matters including schoolwork and social time with peers.

As an etic observer, Latinx students may not have faith that I will fairly represent them. My hope is that they know me well enough to trust me. I know trust is earned over time and through experiences; and I know I may not earn the trust of every student, so I may have had students who qualify for the study but chose not to participate. Students who were enrolled in my courses may have feared academic or social repercussions in class based on what they reveal to me in the study; some may have feared ridicule from

peers for participation. They may also have tailored their answers based on what they thought I wished to hear so as to be in my favor.

Researcher bias is another limitation of my study as it includes what Roulston (2010) calls "'transformative'" (p. 220, single quotations marks in original) interviewing which means I may be asking leading questions, inviting students to consider elements of being a Latinx student in my school which they may not have previously thought about. Maxwell (2013) said "your research questions formulate what you want to understand; your interview questions are what you ask people to gain that understanding" (p. 101). I know my interview questions may have included topics participants have not considered as part of the educational scaffolding they encounter, and by prompting this discussion, students may have answered questions with a visceral response which may or may not reflect their true thoughts.

Organization of the Dissertation

Following this introductory chapter, I reviewed existing literature in chapter two. Chapter two looks at studies which have been conducted on, and articles which have been written about the Latinx student experience. My study is grounded in Paulo Freire's (1970/2014) critical pedagogy theoretical framework and as a subset of this, on cultural democracy (Adams & Goldbard, 1990). Advocacy for the Latinx learner who is disadvantaged because they do not see themselves in texts or school culture fits into the subset of cultural democracy. The disadvantaged learner advocating for themself is central to Freire's (1970/2014) premise.

In chapter three, I explain my methodology which involved interview questions with participants that are "open-ended and less structured [because] less-structured

formats assume that individual respondents define the world in unique ways" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015, p.110). The interview questions sought to understand the background of the Latinx learner to have an idea of what expectations the participant has of school and develop thoughts about how to meet the needs of the Latinx learner so they can have the same opportunities as their hegemonic peers.

I used a purposeful, convenience sample (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015) of students for the sake of efficiency. I used observation to "triangulate emerging findings" (p. 139) from qualitative data. While I used quantitative data from PowerSchool to determine grades and attendance, quantitative data does not play a role in my findings, therefore this study is best categorized as having a qualitative research design (Cohen et al, 2018).

In chapter four I present my findings of the qualitative aspects of my study and review the quantitative data. (Dissertation in practice guidance document, 2021). The "qualitative findings are often presented in thick, rich detail and are presented to address research questions and constructs of the study" (p. 31). Participants answered open-ended questions in order to give the greatest opportunity to express themselves on the selected topics. Quantifiable data includes demographic information about students' families' countries of origin, their own country of birth and the language(s) spoken at home.

In chapter five I explained the implications of the research (Dissertation in practice guidance document, 2021). I began with an overview of obstacles faced by Latinx students in my district and continue to the findings and conclusions as described in the dissertation in practice guidance document (2021). Lunenburg and Irby (2007) said

Here you discuss, analyze, and explain the results of each research question (or hypothesis), variable, or theme. Examine the extent to which the data answered

your research questions, supported/failed to support your hypotheses, showed

functional relationships between variables, or made sense of the themes. (p. 229)

I wrote about the discoveries I made based on the findings and offer suggestions on how

we can proceed in the future. Further examination of the topic is critical to find potential

solutions for increasing Latinx student achievemen

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

In many American communities we house students who fled a country in which they had good reason to be fearful, for safe harbor in the land of opportunity. Mercado (2021) explained that the risk of illegal immigration for many refugees is worth it because of the dire conditions in their homelands. "Migrants describe terrifying scenarios in their native countries. Components include political crisis, organised [*sic*] crime, violent gangs, extreme poverty, climate change and natural disasters" (para. 2). Despite obstacles getting to the United States, the number of Latinx migrants showing up at the U.S. southern border is surging (U.S. customs and border protection, 2024).

It may be difficult for native-born Americans to imagine how it feels to be a new immigrant to the United States, in particular, a teenage immigrant, whose schooling was interrupted in order to pursue safety. In many cases the welcome mat is rolled out for immigrant students, but not always. Some Americans may be sympathetic to the newly arrived, remembering the immigrants in their own families who made the journey away from familiar culture, foods, and language (Belonging Begins with US, n.d.; (*What Is Welcoming?*, 2022). Other citizens may be outrightly hostile, theorizing newcomers are here to steal jobs, commit crimes, and impose foreign customs on Americans (Olsen, 2019; Reilly, 2016). A study by the Pew Research Center concluded that "when it comes to living in the U.S., a majority (54%) says it has become more difficult to live in the

country as a Latino [*sic*] in recent years" (Lopez et al., 2018b, para. 12). The study referred to all Latinx people, not just new arrivals or those who are undocumented. Latinx students face many of the same pressures as their adult counterparts, in addition to the difficulties which are an inherent part of being an adolescent. Some Americans may demand immigrant students speak English exclusively, or hurl insults at them for being Latinx (Lopez et al., 2018a). In 2018, The Pew Research center discovered that nearly 4-in-10 Latinx (37%) said that during the previous 12 months, someone has expressed support for them because they are Latinx. Yet about the same share (38%) also say they have experienced one of four incidents – being called offensive names, being told to go back to their home country, being criticized for speaking Spanish in public, or experienced discrimination or unfair treatment because they are Latinx.. (Lopez et al., 2018a, para. 5)

While both the terms Hispanic and Latino appear in research, I use the more modern term, Latinx to describe students who have heritage in Mexico, central, and south American countries. Latinx refers more directly to persons with Latin American ancestry, while Hispanic denotes people who are either Spanish speaking or have family history from Spain (Noe-Bustemante et al., 2020; *Hispanic vs Latino* 2022; Bureau, 2021). Latino/a is widely used, but refers to either male or female, while the term, Latinx does not specify a gender (Definition of Latinx, n.d.). While overlap between Hispanic and Latinx is great, Latinx more appropriately describes the ethnographic group members in my study. In addition to Latinx, I refer specifically to students of Mexican-origin. While this group fits into the umbrella definition of Latinx, there is research specific to this subgroup and because Mexico has the largest representation of any country for parental

study participants, it merits separate recognition. I have not come across literature which refers specifically to other subgroups of Latinx Americans.

Problem of Practice

My problem of practice was that some Latinx students do not excel in my high school English classes. With this study, I sought to understand and, where possible, mitigate factors which cause this group of students to underperform in class. Underperformance on standardized tests, class tests, quizzes, and essay scores could be the result of my more newly immigrated students not understanding or speaking English, a problem reflected in other parts of the nation (Arbelo-Marrero, 2016; Romero, 2017). I have had English Language Learners (ELLs) in my classes who sit patiently, listening but not understanding, waiting for the day when the words they do not comprehend, have meaning.

The Pew Research Center (2021) identified Spanish speakers to be America's largest, and continually growing, group of newcomers (Budiman et al., 2021). I have had Latinx students who came to the United States as young children and acquired a strong working knowledge of English, as well as those who immigrated as teenagers who struggle with the language, and others who have generations of English-speaking family. These students often do not see themselves represented in fictional literature read in English classes or hear about their histories in non-fictional literature (Darder, 1993). Seeing ourselves in literature is a gift. It is an empowering experience as a reader to see a protagonist who has a similar name to us and shares a similar background. It is uplifting to meet a character who is like you in some way and relate to them, watch them develop and grow over time in a way that is not cliché. It is inspiring to read an author's work

whose voice feels like that of a family member. It is special to be able to connect with a person you will never get to meet. These mirrors help us see ourselves in relation to the world and help us build connection and a sense of belonging. They also show readers what is possible (Kawi, 2020, para. 8).

Research Questions

My main question for research is: How does a Latinx student experience a high school English class in a mono-lingual district? This question straddles multiple experiences of being a Latinx high school student, spanning from the newest immigrants to those whose families have been in the United States for one or more generations. A secondary question for research is: What can be done to increase academic performance for Latinx students?

Valenzuela (2009) identified generational differences in academic achievement for Mexican-origin students. Her research indicated that newly immigrated Mexican-origin learners perform better than their latter-generational counterparts. While I would have liked to have included newer immigrants as well as later-generations of Latinx students in my own study, the majority of the convenience sample of participants had at least one parent born outside of the United States making the participants mostly second-generation Americans as defined by the Merriam-Webster dictionary (*Definition of Second-Generation*, 2023).

The literature review revealed a number of obstacles for Latinx students including lack of social capital (Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995), lack of instruction in their native language (Alvear, 2019), and lower esteem for their native languages compared to English (Ek et al., 2013). The literature read in English classes rarely acknowledges the

existence of the Latinx community, instead focusing on Anglo-centric texts which are key sources for performing well on state tests (Skerrett, 2009). These educational deficits and others are ones I sought to address in my action research study. By understanding how a Latinx student experiences a high school English class in a mono-lingual district, which emphasizes Euro-centric texts, we as teachers will have a blueprint for how to determine and address the inequities faced by these students.

Purpose of the Literature Review

The purpose of the literature review is to investigate peer-reviewed, scholarly research and determine how such literature confirms or disputes my hypotheses. I sought to add to the conversation about how to best serve my Latinx population of students. A "complex literature review" (Machi & McEvoy, 2016, p. 4) not only revealed current information about my topic but also helped determine what aspects of the Latinx experience in a high school English class warrant additional study (Machi & McEvoy, 2016). The literature review helped me understand the scope of research conducted and determine what research gaps may exist.

Methods

To locate sources for my "complex literature review" (Machi & McEvoy, 2016, p. 6), I searched on JSTOR, ERIC, and EBSCO. At times, simple google searches have been fruitful as well. I began my search on the University of South Carolina libraries website by going to the Library Resources section on the university's student gateway page. I then navigated to the FindIt@UofSC Libraries section and entered search terms specific to my problem of practice. Among the terms I entered were: Latinx (which auto-corrects to "Latino"), high school, student, ELL, Hispanic, and dual-language. I used both

the terms Hispanic and Latinx in conducting my search. The Pew Research Center (2020) says "a new, gender-neutral, pan-ethnic label, Latinx, has emerged as an alternative [...] to describe the nation's Hispanic population" (Noe-Bustemante et al., 2020, p.1). I also included the term Mexican-origin, as there is literature which pertains specifically to this Latinx subgroup. From the populated list, I select items which are available through open access, online, or can be delivered, either to the internet or to my home through my institution's library. I selected from sources which are printed most recently by setting my filter to the years 2017 to 2022, but sometimes found older articles that are relevant to my problem of practice and have theories which have held up against the test of time. The sources I selected are largely found in peer-reviewed journals or are chapters in books.

The information I sought concerned strategies which have both worked and failed in educating Latinx students in a secondary school, English class setting. One article I found particularly helpful was *Dual-Language Immersion Programs Raise Student Achievement in English* (Steele et al., 2019). This article explained the great benefits for non or limited English-speaking students who receive instruction in their native languages, while improving their skills in English. The title of the article speaks to the success of the program and begs the question of why it has not been attempted in all districts. The purpose of my complex literature review was to uncover information which impacts the Latinx students at my school. I sought to understand the motivations of Latinx students and their perceptions of education, particularly how they respond to a high school English class. I believe further study of the Latinx experience in schools is of

growing importance as the population of Latinx students continues to increase (Bureau, 2021; Lopez et al., 2013).

Theoretical Frameworks

I situated my problem of practice within the frameworks of cultural democracy (Adams & Goldbard, 1993) and critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970/2014). I sought to reveal why Latinx students have lower rates of college entrance, and other markers of academic success than their White counterparts (Manzano-Sanchez et al., 2019; Román, 2015). If the why is discovered and understood, it is logical to fix the systematic failures which keep Latinx students from enjoying the scholarly achievements of their White classmates. If the errors are known and not corrected, it would be logical to believe that a portion of educational policy makers favor societal and institutionalized discrimination against Latinx students, and do not wish for them to enjoy academic success.

Cultural Democracy

Adams and Goldbard (1993, 1995, 2005) explained that all cultures are of equal importance and participation in one's culture is a right we each have. The idea of a melting pot in which original cultures fade into something new and different is contrary to the idea of cultural democracy which "accepts and respects diversity as a strength to be preserved rather than a problem to be resolved" (1995, para. 3). For students to enjoy the benefits of cultural democracy in education, their culture needs to be recognized and celebrated within the school setting.

Critical Pedagogy

Paulo Freire's (1970/2014) critical pedagogy theory lent itself to my theoretical framework, since students are being asked to examine the state of their learning and

evaluate what should change for them to receive a more equitable education, one that is currently enjoyed by their White, middle-class peers (Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995). According to Freire (1970/2014), the disadvantaged need to speak up for themselves in order to see benefits. He explained it is something like a birthing process, painful, but with great rewards. "Only as they discover themselves to be the "hosts" of the oppressor can they contribute to the midwifery of their liberating pedagogy" (Freire, 2014, p. 48). The birthing process is a good metaphor for Latinx students advocating for their learning. They must impress on policy makers that whatever difficult transition may be necessary to achieve greater access to educational opportunities will be well worth the effort in the long run. An outcome of higher learning for Latinx students ultimately benefits everyone in the students' communities, as it translates into greater critical thinking and the ability to compete for higher paying jobs (Chamorro-Premuzic & Frankiewicz, 2019).

Seminal and Contemporary Perspectives

Latinx scholar Valenzuela (2009) explained that schooling has a way of lessening a student's culture of origin to blend in with school culture. This is not surprising since those from foreign lands have long been expected to merge into the greater culture of American society. Assimilation into the dominant culture has been a way for those from other cultures to fit into their new homelands. Valenzuela (2009) contended that students who feel less tied to their culture of origin do not experience the same level of fervor for school as do students who recently immigrated from Mexico to the United States. "Immigrant youth experience school significantly more positively than do their U.S.-born peers" (Valenzuela, 2009, p. 338). Valenzuela (2009) explained that generational status

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has a strong influence on students' attitudes about school. This begs the question of what is the difference in experience of immigrants versus their latter generational peers. Valenzuela (2009) argued it is the "de-Mexicanization" (p. 338) which occurs when schools inexplicitly or explicitly ask students to reject speaking Spanish and renounce their Mexican culture.

While Valenzuela's (2009) study focused on Mexican American students, it is reasonable to understand that her conclusions may apply to other Latinx student communities as well. Any student who speaks Spanish and looks Latinx can be vulnerable to having their culture devalued by the school norms Valenzuela (2009) spoke of, harming the learner by hindering enjoyment of their culture. The blocking of one's own culture in favor of a more dominant culture results in a disconnect between the two, leaving the student with the struggle of choosing between home and school cultures, or hiding one of the two cultures while they are participating in the other one (Valenzuela, 2009). The practice of a hegemonic society making a student feel less proud of their heritage and culture does not encourage the student to be more participatory in the dominant community.

Valenzuela (2009) pointed to quantitative evidence of greater scholarly achievement for Mexican immigrants when compared to second and third generation counterparts. Valenzuela (2009) explained that most non-White youth are not placed in college-bound tracks which may be another reason why Mexican youth do not achieve as much as their non-Latinx peers. She went on to say that "immigrant students acquiesce and are consequently seen by their teachers as polite and deferential" (p. 343). Her explanation for this was that, unlike Mexican Americans, new immigrants are less subject

to the subtracting of language and culture (Valenzuela, 2009). New immigrants have the advantage of arriving in the United States with a rich culture, but over time, and generations, Valenzuela (2009) argued schools work on eliminating students' home heritages in favor of assimilation into American society. Patel (2012) argued "the effects of assimilation range from depression, loss of identity, homesickness and even mental illness" (para.6). The emotional damage some immigrant Latinx students face when entering school in the United States could be mitigated by schools employing cultural democracy.

Valenzuela (2009) said "caring" (p. 342) plays a large role in whether Latinx students choose to engage in a class. If the student feels positively about a teacher, they may be more willing to put forth effort in that class. Darder (1993) extends the argument beyond providing care for Latinx students, saying that the best teacher for Latinx students is a Latinx teacher. "Latino [*sic*] educators have waged major campaigns to maintain and nurture the cultural values, history, communication styles, and language of the children in their communities" (p. 196). Darder (1993) said that while some Latinx educators understand the Latinx experience as only someone of that heritage can, many are "expected to conform and assimilate [...] to the Eurocentric cultural system that informs the practices, preparation, and certification requirements of the profession" (p. 196). Darder (1993) reflected on her own experiences as a Latinx student in U.S. public schools, saying she was never taught about contributions from Latinx to the country or the world. Like Valenzuela (2009), Darder (1993) saw Latinx culture sacrificed for the sake of assimilation, and "discard[ed] the values of their primary culture, breaking free of all bonds to a cultural or ethnic identity" (p. 200). This repudiation of culture is the

subtraction Valenzuela (2009) says hurts later generations of Latinx students and what Patel (2012) posited may lead to depression and mental illness.

In direct contrast to Valenzuela's (2009) assertion that second and third generations are more likely to struggle with school, Román (2015) found that the number of generations a Latinx student had family in the U.S. was not a factor in students' attitudes toward education; he said "generation is not an element influencing school dropout" (p. 83). Román (2015) based his opinion on the National Education Longitudinal Survey of 1988 to 1992 which began with students in eighth grade and included subsequent interviews in 1990, 1992, 1994, and 2000. The respondents included students who graduated from high school as well as those who did not. Román (2015) made the case that the younger one is when they come to the United States, the greater the chances of them pursuing higher education. In addition, he reported that having more than three siblings reduced the chances for high school graduation.

The Lack of Esteem for Speakers of Spanish

In a study of bilingual teacher candidates in Texas, Ek et al. (2013) posited that Spanish speakers in the United States face "double linguistic oppression [because] the Spanish language has lower prestige and status than English" (p. 197). While the study focused on teacher candidates, it is reasonable to postulate that the findings are relevant to bilingual Americans in other realms, including high school students. The report said "many of our bilingual/bidialectical [*sic*] students report hostility and violence directed against them because of their way of speaking" (p. 197). Ek et al. (2013) explained that subjugating Spanish and Spanish speakers has history dating back to the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe. "It was not long before overt discrimination became evident in public schools

in which Mexican children were harshly disciplined for speaking Spanish in hopes of eradicating this language completely" (p. 207). Children caught speaking Spanish would be physically disciplined through the use of switches, rulers and kneeling (Elk et al., 2013). Elk et al. (2013) explained this type of anti-Spanish attitude remains in our culture and is sometimes leveled at Latinx, Spanish speakers from other Latinx members. Ek (2013) shared an anecdote in which she witnessed a Spanish speaking woman being mocked by "someone who had dark skin, and *mestiza* features" (p. 208). Ek (2013) explained that the use of Spanish can be perceived as a sign of undocumented status. If adults experience this type of jeering from other adults, including those who may be Latinx, it is reasonable to understand that our Latinx high school students are vulnerable to similar culturally demeaning assaults.

This type of subjugation of Latinx culture is evident in educational policies and practices. Skerrett (2009) analyzed trends in standardized testing and determined that education in the United States has not been responsive to the cultures of students. Skerrett (2009) said teaching students to be successful on such tests results in "monocultural educational practices [which] emphasize and reify Anglo-centric knowledge and traditional, testable academic skills over other cultural forms of knowledge and knowing" (p. 279). Her reasoning is well grounded since teachers must teach to the test in order to have their students perform well on high-stakes exams, and the tests traditionally rely on hegemonic literature, a point confirmed by the manager of performance assessments with the Oakland Unified School District in Oakland, California. Choi (2020) explained that while giving a standardized test to tenth graders, one student asked him about the context of a question on the test. The question was about someone who might receive a "'key to

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the city'" (Choi, 2020, para. 5, quotation marks in original). This student was unfamiliar with the phrase as would be many, non-White, non-middle class learners who are unfamiliar with White, middle-class colloquialisms not commonly used in Latinx or other minority students' communities.

High Stakes Testing Reliance on Anglocentric Texts

Skerrett's (2009) study focused on the educational practices of 17 secondary English teachers in the United States and Canada. She sought to determine the impact of English teachers with regard to diversity and found that the "desires and efforts to be culturally responsive were largely stymied by the traditions of secondary English teaching that were fortified by high stakes testing in this age of educational standardization" (p. 282). Skerrett (2009) went on to describe the highly Anglocentric curriculum used by the teachers despite a mission statement which says their curriculum is culturally inclusive. Her interview excerpts included acknowledgement from teachers that the educational materials used, largely excluded their multi-ethnic population (Skerrett, 2009). Among the reasons for this included the high status of classical texts (Skerrett, 2009), which forces educational researchers, such as me, to consider why these Anglocentric texts are held in higher esteem than other cultures' literature.

Teachers in Skerrett's (2009) study discussed not being able to locate high quality multicultural material for their students. Rojas (2010) explained that most educators do not make an effort to seek out a variety of Latinx reflective material, relying on the few and easily accessible resources provided by textbook publishers. Teachers may not be motivated to find a variety of Latinx reading material because of high stakes tests being dependent on Anglocentric literature (Skerrett, 2009). With high stakes testing at the core

of educational practices and policies (Skerrett, 2009), it is no wonder some non-White students fail to achieve at the levels of their White counterparts. The curriculum for all students has been written and practiced with the White, Euro-American student in mind, even though the nation is moving toward a larger minority, and specifically larger Latinx population (Krogstad & Noe-Bustamante, 2021).

Rojas (2010) made the case that the rare appearances of Latinx authors in high school literature books, showcase a small and repeating set of Latinx writers, for the purpose of *appearing* to be inclusive. The cultural democracy framework (Adams & Goldbard, 1993, 1995, 2005) explained the importance of celebrating cultures so it is logical to believe that some literature read in class should reflect the population reading the material. Recognizing oneself in literature can be a life changing experience, transforming struggling readers into voracious ones (Depenbrock, 2022).

The Benefits of Culture and Native Language

Zacarian and Staehr Fenner (2020) aligned with Valenzuela (2015) in that they posited schools seek to remove the elements which Latinx students need in order to be successful, such as culture and language, ignoring the multitude of benefits these elements have for Latinx students. Zacarian and Staehr Fenner (2020) supported the idea of "an assets-based perspective" (p. 6) which means capitalizing on the characteristics within a student's family. An example given is the parents of a student named Alfredo (p. 3). Alfredo's parents were migrant farm workers with knowledge about how weather patterns impact crops. Alfredo is the beneficiary of this knowledge which could stimulate an interest in weather dynamics, agriculture or other areas of science. Ignoring this area of expertise is tantamount to throwing away valuable knowledge because it comes from

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people without degrees, but with vast day to day experience in the area. Were Alfredo's parents invited to share their knowledge with schoolchildren, not only would the students benefit, but the pride Alfredo could feel from having his parents impart information to his peers would be incalculable.

Zacarian and Staehr Fenner (2020) suggested educators become familiar with their students' likes and interests so as to capitalize on these in a classroom and school setting. In the example of Alfredo (Zacarian and Staehr Fenner, 2020), his parents told the school registration administrator about the child's love for soccer. The school official passed this information along to the soccer coach who encouraged Alfredo to try out for the school team, giving him greater alliance with, and allegiance to school culture.

Zacarian and Staehr Fenner (2020) also noted that at Indian Land High School in Lancaster County, South Carolina, immigrant students are encouraged to write a personal narrative in their home languages, this is then translated into English with the help of a bilingual facilitator. The students then share their stories with faculty in order for teachers and the principal to get to know the student as more than an English language learner. The practice of allowing school officials to learn about their students' interests, fears, hobbies, and outlook is meant to give students a greater bond to their new learning environment. Once connected to the school, students are more invested in making their time there meaningful and take ownership of their learning (Zacarian & Staehr Fenner, 2020).

Martinez (2017) discussed the problem of linguicism faced by Latinx, as well as Black students, saying educators often frown upon and correct the language structure students bring from home. He explained that an attack on one's language is an act of

violence. He proposed that English teachers take the lead in creating a culture in which the speech of Black and Latinx students is honored, not criticized. "For too long, Black and Latinx youth have been asked to sound like their White counterparts in ways that fail to legitimize and humanize them in our English classrooms" (p. 184). Martinez (2017) suggested that English teachers create an environment in which pride about one's home and community language is the norm. This could be a paradox for English teachers who, as Skerrett (2009) points out, must teach students in a way that will help them do well on standardized tests, tests which are constructed solely in, and emphasize performance in Standard American English (SAE) (Nordquist, 2019). Martinez's (2017) theory of incorporating cultural ways of speaking in an English classroom addressed the issue of making students feel comfortable and welcome. But unless there is a change in adherence to SAE on standardized tests, variations of English would be impractical for teachers to implement.

Is Dual-Language Education an Easy Fix?

Some researchers (Alfaro, 2018; Alvear, 2019; Steele et al.*,* 2019; Umansky et al., 2016) explained that dual-immersion education is an effective way to help English Language Learners (ELL) receive the education they need to be successful in American schools. Alvear (2019) discovered that "two-way students had the highest average English reading performance [...]. Students in the most subtractive program, English immersion, had significantly lower achievement" (Alvear, 2019, p. 506). But language learning theories seem to be driven more by politics than by educational data (Alfaro, 2018). As a result, students who would benefit from a dual-instructional program may only receive this if the community in which they live supports the idea. If an ELL student

lives in a district without this program (such as the district I teach in), they will have to remain in English speaking classrooms where they do not understand what the educator is saying.

With a grant from the Institute for Education Sciences (IES), U.S. Department of Education, Umansky et al., (2016) studied whether English Learners (ELs) were better served by English immersion, a program in which students receive instruction in the dominant language, or would have better outcomes in a dual language program in which students received instruction in both their native language and in English. The results leave little doubt that dual immersion programs produce better results for ELs. "ELs in dual immersion programs develop ELA skills much faster than those in English immersion. By 7th grade, dual immersion students' scores have surpassed those of students in English immersion" (p. 11). Umansky et al., (2016) explained that in early grades, the English immersion students bypass their dual immersion counterparts, but the advantage reverses by the time students are in middle school and continues to favor dual immersion students through the end of secondary education. This is not surprising since it has been established that the younger a child is when acquiring a second language, the easier it is for the language to be learned (Galatro, 2018), so it is no wonder that a younger child exposed to English will have greater gains compared to a dual immersion learner. However, an older student in middle and high school will struggle in an English-only environment (Umansky et al., 2016). Districts which do not offer their high school ELs a dual immersion option are in effect, denying those students an education in some disciplines. Students in an English immersion program will be placed in classes with instructors who will only speak English. It is unreasonable to expect ELs to absorb

instruction in their core courses of math, social studies, English, and science, in a language they do not speak or understand.

While in theory, allowing a student to learn and communicate in their home language seems like an ideal situation for immigrant students, some say in practice, Two Way Immersion (TWI) programs often fall short when it comes to educating Latinx students. Cervantes-Soon et al. (2017) explained that "students or communities from minoritized groups were experiencing marginalization or were not benefiting equally from programs as much as White English speakers/communities" (p. 405). TWI education is offered without the explicit purpose of helping minority students, but instead is available to the entire population and is often taken advantage of by White, English-speaking students who seek the economic benefits associated with bilingualism (Cervantes-Soon et al., 2017). This is a difference between dual language immersion and Two Way Immersion. Dual language, also known as bilingual education, was designed explicitly to help ELLs and has been in the United States for the better part of two centuries (Dual-Language Education Definition, 2013).

Two Way Immersion is much newer, having been around for closer to 50 years and includes native speakers of English who are interested in obtaining additional instruction in a language other than English (Two Way Immersion Education: The Basics, 2005). The terms for the two programs have been used interchangeably, despite their differing origins (Developing ELL programs, 2020). Cervantes-Soon et al. (2017) argued that poor implementation of Two Way Immersion teaching includes teachers not properly trained to instruct Spanish speaking immigrants, and bilingual teachers who are adept at conversational Spanish but not fluent enough for academia, as few states require

TWI teachers to have bilingual certification. Cervantes-Soon et al. (2017) also explained that some TWI programs seek teachers from outside the U.S. who may not be prepared to help students from a variety of economic and social backgrounds.

Latinx Students' Unique Needs

Olsen et al. (2017) said the key to Latinx students reducing the gap in academic writing lies in the same teaching practices many of us engage in routinely:

> Teachers can learn to engage Latinos [*sic*] and mainstreamed ELs in higher level interpretive reading and analytical writing about texts through direct strategy instruction, modeling of strategy use, and creating opportunities for students to practice and apply these skills through teacher coaching and feedback. (p. 16)

In my district we call this *I do, we do, you do*, which was one of the first principles of teaching I learned when I joined my district in 2018. This was not presented to me as a strategy specifically for Latinx students, but a way to reach all students, regardless of background.

Olsen et al. (2017) went on to say that teachers should use students' prior knowledge, help students make connections, find ways to help students form interpretations, teach students to monitor and revise meaning, reflect and evaluate. These are all the same educational practices I was taught in my teacher preparation program, a program aimed at educating all students, not specifically Latinx or persons of color. Latinx students have needs which are not met and may be different from their White peers (Darder, 1993; Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995; Valenzuela, 2009) yet the means Olsen et al. (2017) suggest to remedy this gap are no different from the type of instruction good teachers provide regardless of their students' backgrounds.

Darder (1993) said Latinx students need something from teachers only few can provide and that is being a Latinx educator. Darder (1993) says the teacher's culture has a profound impact on whether students see academic success; she said the best educators for Latinx students in the U.S. are teachers students can identify with, namely Latinx teachers. Darder (1993) explained that one of the "most significant contributions that Latino [*sic*] educators make to Latino [*sic*] students is to provide them with positive role models–people with whom their students can relate and with whom they feel comfortable expressing their views" (p. 208). Darder (1993) explained that if a Latinx teacher maintains her cultural integrity, students pick up on this and affirm their own pride of culture, are less likely to be afraid of engaging in speaking Spanish in public and will feel better about themselves resulting in greater academic achievement.

Téllez (2004) disagreed with the assertion that teachers being the same ethnicity as their students is a primary step in students achieving academic success. Téllez (2004) said "creating classrooms in which students and teachers share ethnicity group does not ensure that teachers understand students and vice versa" (p. 46). In fact, she said it could even be harmful to learners, citing Dewey's (1916) belief that students need to be prepared to engage with a variety of people. Téllez (2004) explained that limiting exposure to students' own ethnic community would leave them unprepared for interacting with those outside of this group.

Stanton-Salazar and Dornbusch (1995) recognized that deficits suffered by some Latinx, specifically Mexican-origin high school students, could be the result of a lack of social capital. The pair explained social capital as having "genuinely supportive relationships with institutional agents" (p. 117), such as teachers, guidance counselors, or

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others who can assist students with college and career choices. Without such social capital, students are left to figure out college applications, fees, financial aid, majors, and entrance exams; among other academic issues, on their own. Stanton-Salazar and Dornbusch (1995) said people who need help seeking out these resources fail to ask for assistance. The Mexican-origin high school students who have higher social capital tend to be the ones who have better grades and higher status expectations than their less academic, lower expectation-oriented peers (Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995).

An interesting finding was that students who are bilingual have better access to adult social capital when compared with working-class, English dominant students (Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995). "Bilinguals tend to be either immigrants with many years of residence in this country or native-born persons living with immigrant parents who insist on maintaining the Mexican culture and the Spanish language in their households" (p. 131). The fact that these students' parents hold their culture and native language in high esteem helps these students have greater social capital, and therefore be more successful in both academic and working environments (Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995). This makes a compelling case for Latinx students maintaining their culture and language in order to achieve academic success.

Neglect of Cultural Democracy and Critical Pedagogy.

That our Latinx students do not see themselves represented in most English Language Arts class literature seems to be a case of neglect at best, and at worst, may represent discriminatory practices. That Latinx culture is subtracted (Valenzuela, 2009) from students is clearly a great disservice to them. Evidence shows that Mexican-origin students who are immersed in their culture and are bilingual in Spanish and English have

greater social capital than their English-dominant, working-class peers (Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995). To strip away a student's culture is harmful and offensive (Adams & Goldbard, 1993, 1995, 2005). To believe the dominant culture is superior to other cultures demonstrates arrogance and audacity. It shows an inability on the part of educational policy makers to acknowledge a global community, and incapacity to see the world beyond oneself and those like them. This is the opposite of what education should do.

That an avenue for equality, dual-language educational programs, has been co-opted by White students indicates that resources which should be intended to help struggling Latinx students, are diverted to the dominant population. In fact, the ability to put such programs in place often depended on the dominant population seeing that the curriculum would be beneficial to them (Cervantes-Soon et al., 2017). This suggests that Latinx students have greater obstacles in achieving academic success than their White, middle-class peers; and helps to explain the larger dropout rate among Latinx. As these students' needs go unmet, and they are unrecognized in school literature, education may feel like a place unintended for them, a place they are not welcome, with dropping out feeling like their most logical option.

In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed,* Paulo Freire (1970/2014) said "it is absolutely essential that the oppressed participate in the revolutionary process with an increasingly critical awareness of their role as Subjects [*sic*] of the transformation" (p. 127). Freire's (1970/2014) words explain why an action research project in which student Latinx voices are heard is an essential part of improving educational outcomes for Latinx students. It is

important for educators and policy makers to hear from those most impacted by instructional practices.

Conclusion

As the number of Latinx students continues to grow, it is imperative that this disparity in achievement for our Latinx students be addressed. It is not only in the interest of these students and their families, but in the best interest of society as a whole. As future wage-earners, our Latinx population will indicate whether our government's income will grow, can be maintained, or will fall to a level where goods and services such as roads and schools will suffer. The U.S. census bureau found that "the Hispanic or Latino population, which includes people of any race, was 62.1 million in 2020. The Hispanic or Latino population grew 23%, while the population that was not of Hispanic or Latino origin grew 4.3% since 2010" (Jones et al., 2021, para. 8). In 2050, fewer than 30 years from now, the Latinx population is expected to triple from the 2005 population to 29% of our nation, with the White population shrinking to minority status at 47% (Passel & Cohn, 2008).

As the Latinx population becomes a larger percentage of our nation, the U.S. will be more reliant on Latinx citizens to provide government income through wage taxation. This means that unless the gap in Latinx academic achievement is reversed, students will not be able to get better paying jobs which in turn create more tax revenue. Unless this situation changes, our nation could see a reduction in productivity and a reliance on foreign-made products which will adversely impact our economy. The largest economy worldwide is expected to shift from the United States to China by 2035 (Orlik & Van Roye, 2020). If our nation wishes to change this trajectory, we can begin by

implementing changes to benefit our Latinx students. There may not be a perfect place to

begin the process, but allowing students to see themselves in literature, giving ELLs the

tools data has proven successful, and celebrating Latinx cultures in our schools may be

good places to start. If students can see themselves belonging in an academic

environment, they may seek to further their educations and give themselves better

economic opportunities.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of the study is to determine how Latinx students experience a high school English literature class in a smaller, southern, rural-fringe district. The study's theoretical framework combined cultural democracy (Adams & Goldbard, 1993, 1995, 2005) and critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970/2014). Freire (1970/2014) used critical pedagogy to suggest that the oppressed, those without opportunities, advocate for themselves in order to attempt to secure social equity with the dominant group. Cultural democracy, as outlined by Adams and Goldbard (1993, 1995, 2005) is about equity for all cultures which means Latinx culture should be represented in schools, and particularly in a school with an expanding Latinx population. It is important for all students to be able to see themselves in school culture and feel a sense of belonging, especially Latinx students who have historically had one of the highest high school dropout rates of any ethnic group in the United States (Román, 2015; Valenzuela, 2009). Through this study, I sought Latinx students who would entrust me with their ideas for improving their academic outlook to understand this exodus and find ways of turning it around.

Recognition of a National Trend

Some of my Latinx students are disengaged when we study literature and they sometimes perform poorly on quizzes and tests, reflecting a trend in the nation (Arbelo-Marrero, 2016; Romero, 2017). Oftentimes my Latinx students put their heads down during English class. For some, it may be a language barrier, as my district does not offer

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dual language education. For other Latinx students, the problem may be that they do not see themselves represented in the literature (Darder, 1993; Kawi, 2020). This study sought to find trends such as a lack of representation at school and understanding the Latinx student experience.

The first question for research, understanding how Latinx students experience a high school English class is an initial inquiry toward unravelling the causes of underperformance. This question straddles multiple experiences of being a Latinx high school student, spanning from the newest immigrants to those whose families have been in the United States for one or more generations. Valenzuela (2009) identified generational differences in academic achievement for Mexican-origin students. Her research indicated that newly immigrated Mexican-origin learners perform better than their latter-generational counterparts. Therefore it is valuable to include both newer immigrants and latter generations of Latinx students in an investigation of how Latinx students experience a high school English class.

The second question for research is: What can be done to increase academic performance for Latinx students in high school English classes? This question intended to gain student insight about possible adjustments to curricular activity. The question aligns with what Roulston (2010) described as transformative interviewing in which "the researcher *intentionally* aims to challenge and change the understandings of participants" (p. 220, italics in original). I sought to determine whether or not Latinx students see themselves reflected in the literature we read in class. In doing so, I wanted to learn about educational deficits which may not have previously considered.

Themes I addressed include (a) prejudice toward Latinx students (Lopez et al., 2018); (b) the superiority of dual-language education for ELLs (Dual Language Immersion, n.d.); (c) Latinx comradery among students (through observation and discussion), and (d) cultural responsiveness from schools to the Latinx population.

Interviews with students confirmed what the literature review revealed: Latinx students feel the weight of prejudice. Some find that other students unfamiliar with Latinx culture find customs and foods peculiar. Students also confirmed my observation that when it comes to companionship, it is often more comfortable to rely on the friendship of those who are also Latinx instead of seeking relationships with peers from other ethnicities.

Research Design

The ethnographic research design fits my participatory action research of investigating how a Latinx student experiences a high school English class, in that it studies a particular ethnic group and seeks to determine how this group feels about its treatment. Merriam and Tisdell (2015) described a variety of ethnography forms but said they all have "focus on human society and culture" (p. 29) in common. They described culture as "the beliefs, values, and attitudes that structure the behavior patterns of a specific group of people" (p. 29). While students shared first-person accounts of their individual experiences, the research is dominated by the commonality of Latinx heritage therefore it adheres to the definition of ethnography.

An Etic Perspective

As a person without Latinx heritage, my perspective is "etic" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015, p. 30), as I observed and wrote about this experience without the lens of someone

who is a member of the culture. My participants explained to me what they saw, heard, and the emotions they encountered as a result of being in an English classroom.

Fujii (2015) said "accidental ethnography involves paying systematic attention to the unplanned moments that take place outside an interview, survey or other structured methods" (p. 525). As an observer/researcher, I have noticed that a majority of Latinx students gravitate to other Latinx students for relationships. This includes but is not limited to, romantic relationships between students. This unintended observation, an example of AccE, occurs outside my classroom door when I, and other teachers, monitor our hallways during class changes. I have noticed fewer intercultural relationships among Latinx students compared to their peers who are not outwardly identifiable as Latinx, a hypothesis confirmed by some students. One participant, Agnes explained that some Latinx students not only limit their relationships to other Latinx but go so far as to limit their friendships to those with origins in the same country.

Another student, Estephania said she often sees groups of boys of Mexican heritage socializing in homogeneous groups but said that girls are more likely to branch out to friendships which cross cultural lines. In my class I have observed two Mexican origin students, both boys, who although they sit at opposite sides of the room with many students between, make eye contact and signal one another. Signals may be smiles, a nod of the head, or pointing to their laptop as a way of letting the other know to check the laptop for a message. As their teacher, I have had to let them know to stay on task with their assignments rather than attempt to socialize during class time. In the same class I have noticed that the two Latinx girls wait for one another during our class lunch break so they can walk to the cafeteria together; further examples of AccE. Originally the two

boys were seated near one another, but I had to move them apart because of the frequent social interaction between the two. Even though they are now on opposite sides of the room, the bond remains strong and they still find ways to communicate with one another but not with other students of different heritages who sit closer to each of them. Likewise, the two Latinx girls socialize primarily with one another even though there are other students who sit closer to each of them.

Participants and Data

My qualitative (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015) approach included the data I got from a combination of AccE (Fujii, 2015; Levitan et al., 2020), interviews, survey answers, and observations. I also gathered quantitative data I sourced from my school's grade/attendance platform, PowerSchool. I wanted to understand multiple components of my students' lives including: (a) grades, (b) attendance, (c) family backgrounds and places of origin, and (d) familial responsibilities (such as caregiving roles and income earning practices). Understanding the experiences of participants, what similarities and differences they may have with dominant-culture peers gave me information about their values. Although quantitative data was gathered, this study focused on the qualitative findings.

Close family relationships and Latinx traditions were something participants held in high regard. Knowing this, I believe that allowing Latinx students to participate in and demonstrate Latinx traditions on campus will help students in this subgroup feel more aligned with school culture. Bringing family members on campus to be guest speakers regarding Latinx customs may be a good way of combining students' interests in family and traditions.

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My study has the potential for my district to understand how to better serve the Latinx student population. I observed a desire within my district to provide credit recovery for failing students, so the framework for assisting under-performing students already exists but is not tailored to the Latinx subgroup's needs. If we can understand their various needs and barriers, we can begin to take steps to meet those needs and eliminate barriers.

Setting and Participants

To recruit participants, I looked through my class rosters to see which students are identified as *Hispanic* in school records. I compiled a list of these students and asked them individually if they would like to be part of a study I was conducting. Asking students individually was meant to ensure students' privacy. They could agree or decline to be part of the study without the topic being open to peer questioning. If I noted interest, I then presented them with a letter explaining the purpose of my study, what it is about, and a place for both a parental/guardian and student signature. I distributed the letters in a way that would not draw attention to the distribution, giving letters to students along with the return of graded paper assignments. I was able to recruit nine students for this study. See Table 1 for a list of participants by pseudonym.

Seven of my participants were recruited during the 2022-23 school year. In my five year-long classes I had 21 Latinx students on my roster. I did not ask five of the students because of attendance issues, anticipating that poor attendance in school would make data gathering problematic. I asked 16 eligible students to participate, of which five agreed to join in the study. Two students I taught in previous years who I encountered in

the hallway also agreed to participate. After summer break, I sought to add to the number of participants, thinking it would be best to hear from as many participants as possible.

In the 2023-24 school year my district switched to block scheduling which meant I had fewer classes and fewer students each semester since year-long classes were now condensed to fit into one semester; classes went from 50 to 90 minutes. The curriculum for the course remained the same, and teachers were expected to cover the same material to prepare students for the EOC exam.

In order to hear from more voices for greater data saturation, I reached out to 12 of the 14 Latinx students I had on my roster during the Fall of 2023, eliminating two students because of attendance issues. Two of the 12 students agreed to participate. Another student did secure permission from her guardian, but after reconsideration, chose not to participate. I also visited each of the classes taught by our ELL instructor who had 19 students on her roster. None of the ELL students I visited wished to participate. All told, I had a total of nine participants complete my survey. From the nine, I selected six to interview because their answers to survey questions triggered more questions on my part and I wished to delve more deeply into their answers and have them expand on their replies.

I requested a signed parental/guardian consent letter which allowed students to be part of the study. Block and Gordon (n.d.) explained that it is important to protect the vulnerable from abuses in research, and among those at risk are children. "They may be vulnerable to control, coercion, undue influence, and manipulation by others (for example, parents or guardians, researchers, teachers, and others)" (sec. Subpart D, parenthesis in original). The permission letter notified parents and guardians that I am

requesting their child's participation in a study on how a Latinx student experiences a high school English class. I also explained this is not a district or school survey, but one I am exploring as a doctoral student with the University of South Carolina.

My greatest struggle was finding a meeting time for interviewing participants. I know many students take the bus or have other transportation issues which hinder plans to stay after school. The survey was not so much of a problem since participants wished to take the survey online, they could do so at their leisure. Scheduling interviews required more thought since I wanted to interview students face-to-face. Most interviews were conducted after students completed end of course (EOC) exams when instruction in many classrooms has tapered down.

My classroom served as our interview setting. The class is set up similarly to other high school classrooms with 30 student desks, divided into six rows facing the front of the room where seated students see a smartboard and a whiteboard. I asked participants about times they felt would be convenient for interviewing. With their schedules in mind, I arranged for students to meet with me one at a time. Most students arranged to meet with me during their lunch period so as to not miss instruction. I sat in a student desk facing the participant who was also seated in a student desk while I asked questions. I explained I would be recording our interview on my Iphone to ensure I accurately reflected the opinions expressed.

Table 1.1

Participant Demographics

	Participant pseudonym	Grade level	Identified gender	Country of origin	Parents' country of origin	Primary home language
1	Agnes	10th	F	USA	Mexico	Spanish
2	Manny	11th	M	USA	USA and Mexico	Spanish
3	Anna	9th	F	USA	Mexico	Spanish
4	Eduardo	10th	M	USA	Mexico	Spanish
5	*Rojelio	11th	M	USA	USA and Bolivia	English
6	*Sarita	10th	F	USA	USA and Bolivia	English
7	Seli	10th	F	USA	USA	Spanish and English
8	Estephania	10th	F	USA	Mexico	Spanish
9	Dyl	9th	M	USA	USA and Panama	Spanish

*Rojelio and Sarita are siblings who were taught in different years by the study organizer.

Methods of Data Collection

I selected a purposeful, convenience population (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015) of past and present students. "Purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015, p. 96). This is a convenience sample (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015) because I recruited participants in a way which is cost effective and had ease since participants came from the school where I teach. Participant opinions were initially gathered through an online survey and were followed up with individual interviews. Choosing which students to interview and on what topics was determined by answers to survey questions. If an answer seemed like it

was incomplete or there could be more information than what was relayed in the survey, I asked students for greater clarification individually during our interviews. Observation and AccE (Fujii, 2015) were other methods of data collection largely used to triangulate findings from survey questions and student interviews.

Role of the Researcher

As a researcher I have noticed an inequity in how my school responds to Latinx culture and through participatory action research I sought to bring attention to it for the purpose of repairing the diminished consideration paid to this population. Anderson et al. (2007) explained that "researchers are using data in such a way as to inform their own actions as well as contribute to knowledge production in education" (p. 158). Contribution to the field of education seems a loftier objective than Shumsky's (1958) assertion that action researchers seek to work out issues they encountered as students. While Anderson et al.'s (2007) thought process on the role of the researcher is more virtuous and therefore more palatable, I cannot dismiss Shumsky's (1958) claim that we as researchers seek to tackle problems we identify with.

When I was in elementary school, the school sponsored a Santa Claus drawing contest, I knew that as a Jew, my heritage was not considered. Efron and Ravid (2020) aligned with Shumsky's (1958) theory when they said "researchers must acknowledge their own personal values and how these values shape their perceptions and interpretations" (p. 46). I believe my own experiences contributed to my selection of a group to study which I believe is also underrepresented in school culture.

As their teacher or former teacher, I had a working relationship with each of the participants. I sought to present the stories of the participants in their own voices to give a

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platform to students whose needs may otherwise be unarticulated, making these participants semi-collaborators. On reflection, I believe my own experiences contributed to wanting to give agency to a population which seems to have little of it.

Interviewing and Surveying

All nine participants responded to each of the 12 survey questions. Of the nine respondents, I felt six could provide additional details to one or more of the survey questions and asked the six for a time to meet with me for an interview. Some students said they felt less included in school culture than other ethnicities which made me want to know more, inspiring me to request interviews with these students so they could explicate their answers. One participant said she felt a connection to Curley's wife in *Of Mice and Men,* another answer which made me curious and wish to know more about her connection to this White character. A different student said she wished to read "the type of literature Chicanos made during the Chicano Movement," an answer that sparked my interest and desire to penetrate more deeply into her response. Answers such as these stimulated my wish to learn more about participants' desires for their education.

The nature of my interviews with participants was "open-ended and less structured [because] less-structured formats assume that individual respondents define the world in unique ways" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015, p.110). I sought to understand the differences and similarities Latinx high school students have both within the group, as well as compared to other non-Latinx peers. Of course, some structure was an inherent part of my information gathering process, as all participants received a set of questions which helped me identify characteristics for each student such as whether they were born in the United States or have at least one parent who was born outside of the U.S., as well

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as other key demographic inquiries such as understanding that the dominant home language among participants was Spanish.

Observations

In addition to surveying and interviewing participants, I paid attention to how Latinx students behave, speak, listen, and interact with one another, non-Latinx peers, myself, other teachers, and administrators. As Merriam and Tisdell (2015) point out, "observations are especially important in ethnographic studies" (p. 137). I knew I needed to be careful in using this tool because of the subjectivity involved in observational studies (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). I saw observation as a means to "triangulate emerging findings" (p. 139). As an example of this, I point to my observation that Latinx students in romantic relationships tend to pair up with other Latinx students, while students outside of the Latinx group are more likely to date outside of their origin culture. This is something I asked study participants about, both in the survey and in interviews; responses confirmed this theory, observations triangulated it.

AccE as explained by Levitan et al. (2020) and Fujii (2015) is the unplanned encounters I witnessed which proved to be an instrumental tool for observing Latinx student behavior. From my classroom doorway I could observe how students interact with one another as they passed through corridors. I could see which students walked in groups, who paired off, and I listen as Latinx students spoke Spanish to one another. Observations were made during normal student-monitoring duties. I was assigned to monitor the hallways near our new cafeteria as students arrived at school. Teachers are also required to be in the hallways outside of our classroom doors to monitor students

during transitions between classes. Because students are accustomed to seeing teachers observe them, this practice appeared to be routine monitoring of students.

Procedure

Survey questions were offered in both online and printed formats (all participants selected the online option), with enough room for respondents to write out answers. Some answers, particularly the ones to open-ended questions triggered additional questions from me which were asked during one-to-one interviews with participants. Interviews were conducted individually to protect participants' privacy.

I understood that some of the questions asked on my survey of students may cause students and their families concern and perhaps change their minds about participation. Questions included where parents and the participants were born and how the participants see their heritage being represented in school culture. I knew some families could have been reluctant to share information about their background, fearing legal implications for those who are not documented and are in violation of immigration laws. I also know as an etic researcher, my exploring the ethnography of another culture may be viewed as intrusive and perhaps suspicious. I was pleased to attract enough participants to make this study meaningful, both for the participants and for those who review and enact public education policies.

Data Analysis

To ensure student privacy I assigned pseudonyms to each participant. I reviewed answers and grouped them according to similarities. Interviews were conducted with six of the nine participants. Each interview was transcribed by listing to the recording multiple times. I then compared interview answers to one another and to the survey

answers to draw conclusions. Observations and AccE were written out as well to triangulate findings from the survey and interviews.

Coding

Coding (Saldaña, 2009) qualitative data involved contemplating participants' answers and determining how to best categorize this data. An example of this was coding the data to the question *Is there literature you wish you read in English class which is not currently taught? If so, describe this literature.* Coding answers of *no* was straight forward. Coding other answers involved determining what type of literature students wished to read and whether the literature was Latinx oriented or another variety. Merriam and Tisdell (2015) said that qualitative data "collection and analysis should be a *simultaneous* process" (p. 195, italics in original). Although my collection and analysis were done in stages, I understand Merriam and Tisdell's (2015) point because data collection through my survey led to enough analysis for me to form new questions which were then asked in interviews.

Validity

I used "member checking, triangulation, thick description, [and] peer reviews" (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 124) to ensure my qualitative results meet validity criteria. Creswell and Miller (2000) explained that validity is an accurate measure of the "participants' realities of the social phenomena" (p. 124) with attention to the inferences drawn from the data collected. Approaching my data through a "critical perspective" (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 126) afforded me the opportunity to "uncover hidden assumptions about how narrative accounts are constructed, read, and interpreted" (p. 126). Member checking (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015) allowed me to take my findings to my

participants to have them confirm or make changes to my results. By using more than one method for data collection, I was able to triangulate findings, giving my study validity. Thick descriptions help others understand the perspectives of my participants.

Tracy (2013), Patton (2015) and other qualitative scholars created checklists for researchers to determine if their studies meet rigorous standards of validity. "Qualitative researchers need to respond to the concerns of outsiders, many of whom may be unfamiliar with or blatantly challenging of the credibility of qualitative research" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015, p. 241). Although researchers identified different elements for cross checking data, they seem to agree that results need to be verifiable, and the highest ethical standards of research must apply (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015) so that anyone who reads the study can be assured of its authenticity.

The study of ethics, validity and consideration for participants helped guide me through the process of collecting and interpreting data in a respectful and fair manner with accuracy as a constant beacon. My study capitalized on the presentation of authentic Latinx student voices. My hope for this study is to empower Latinx students to speak up for their rights in alignment with Freire's (1970/2014) theory of critical pedagogy in which the oppressed demand to be treated equitably.

Limitations

My study is limited to the voices I encountered and may not represent all Latinx students in our nation, my state, district and school. Students who are undocumented or have family members who are undocumented may not have participated in the study because of fear of deportation. This may represent a substantial number of Latinx

students whose opinions were not included in this study, a study which could potentially

benefit non-English speakers the most.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to determine if the high school Latinx students

served by this district are receiving the necessary education for them to have the same

academic success as non-Latinx peers. The study is significant because according to COE

- Status Dropout Rates (2021), Latinx students have one of the highest rates of high

school dropout rates and is "Central High School's" [a pseudonym] fastest growing

demographic (*Data from 135th day of school. [PowerSchool],* 2023). As the number of

Latinx students matriculate through the school and take their places in society, it is

important to produce a population of productive citizens who can contribute to the

community by being highly qualified for jobs and higher education. By ensuring the

needs of this subgroup of learners are met, society can expect a promising outcome in the

years ahead.

Questions for Research

The primary research question this study addressed was the understanding of how

a Latinx student experiences a high school English class in a rural-fringe, (U.S.

department of education, 2021, sec. School details), monolingual South Carolina district.

The national center for education statistics (2022) classifies districts into four categories:

city, suburban, town and rural. Within each category there are subcategories: fringe,

distant and remote. A rural-fringe district is described as "rural territory that is less than

or equal to 5 miles from an Urbanized Area, as well as rural territory that is less than or

equal to 2.5 miles from an Urban Cluster" (*NCES Locale classifications and criteria*,

n.d., sec. Rural-fringe (41).

The secondary question for research sought to determine best practices for

addressing possible deficits in the education of Latinx students. By identifying what

Latinx students feel are important factors in their academic success, educators can further

examine potential solutions to these needs. Solutions may be applicable locally as well as

on a broader scale for schools with similar concerns for Latinx students.

Theoretical Frameworks

The study was grounded in two theoretical frameworks: Freire's critical pedagogy

(1970/2014), and cultural democracy as defined by Adams and Goldbard (1993, 1995,

2005). Through the lens of cultural democracy, the study sought to preserve Latinx

culture and help it flourish in classrooms so that Latinx students feel a sense of belonging

in school communities.

The *"reflection* and *action* directed at the structures to be transformed" Freire

(1970/2014, p. 126, italics in original) spoke about is at the heart of this study. Freire

(1970/2014) explained that change for the oppressed must begin with those who are

suffering. Reflection is the first step in discovering if and how structures should be

transformed to best serve the Latinx population. This study took a ruminative look at

current practices, examining the question of how Latinx students experience a high

school English class in a monolingual southeastern school district, and whether Latinx

students feel their culture is honored as defined by cultural democracy (Adams &

Goldbard; 1993, 1995, 2005). A sense of inclusion in school culture can deter the trend of Latinx student drop-out rates (Lopez et al., 2020).

Academic Rigor and Locale

In this study, I explored the question of underperformance of some Latinx students with nine Latinx students. At the end of the Spring 2022 academic year, I surveyed seven students, interviewing five of them. I added two additional survey participants and one additional interview in the Fall of 2023. This made for a total of nine survey participants and six interviews. Although I had enough data with my initial group, I thought it would be beneficial to include as many voices as possible. Since I had two students who were interested in participation the following term, I extended my data gathering to include these two students.

English 2 is a required high school class in preparation for graduation (South Carolina department of education, 2023). It is also a class in which a state-mandated end-of-course exam (EOC) is given. The test counts for 20% of a student's grade in English 2 (*South Carolina EOCEP Brochure for Parents and High School Students*, 2022). Therefore it is difficult for students to pass the course without passing the EOC. This makes English 2 a critical course for students to understand. Analyzing student engagement in this class allows us to determine if changes should be made to better engage Latinx students.

The study took place in a rural fringe district in the southeastern United States. Latinx students represent the fastest growing demographic in this school's population (U.S. department of education, 2021; *Data from 135th Day of School,* 2023). The number of Latinx students at the high school in the 2012-13 school year was just 74. This

skyrocketed to 267 in the 2023-24 school year which represents growth of 260.81% (see Appendix B). During this same time, the Black population grew by 52.59% and the White population saw a decrease of 19.21% from its highest level in the 2016-17 school year to the 2023-24 school year (*Data from 135th Day of School*, 2023). The school has an English Language Learners (ELL) program, a classroom in which students whose first language is not English can find resources to help with schoolwork, but no newcomers program, dual-language curriculum or Latinx heritage literature embedded in the curriculum.

Of the 37 eligible students on my rosters identified in the district's database, PowerSchool as Hispanic, 30 were invited to participate in the study. Of the students invited, nine chose to participate, all of whom were students I taught; none of the 19 students from the ELL classes I visited chose to participate. One participant was identified as a previous ELL student enrolled in English 2; she was not among the students in the ELL classes I visited. The student was born in the United States but explained that her first language was Spanish.

Demographic Data Analysis

Statistical and demographic data about the participants was collected on a survey sent via email on Google forms. Three of the participants were male, the remaining six identified themselves as female. All nine of the participants responded that they were born in the United States. Students said their parents were from Mexico, the United States, Panama and Bolivia with nine of the 16 parents coming from Mexico, four from the United States, one from Bolivia and one from Panama, making Mexico the country with the greatest number of parental roots. (Two of the participants are siblings with the

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same parents, so although there were nine participants, each with two parents, there were 16, rather than 18 parents counted.) Five students answered that Spanish was the language most recurrently spoken in their homes. Three students said English was the primary language and one student said Spanish and English were used with equal frequency, making Spanish the most frequently spoken home language among the participants.

Consent/assent forms were given to interested students to take home and review with parents. Once a signed form was returned, the student was asked if they would prefer to be emailed a link to the google form which housed twelve questions or would prefer to see the survey on paper. All participants chose the electronic version of the survey.

Survey

Qualitative data was obtained through a Google form online survey, one-on-one interviews, field notes of observations, and AccE. AccE as described by Fujii (2015) occurs when unintentionally witnessing student interactions in both academic and non-academic settings. In non-academic settings this was done through observation during morning hallway duty, between class hallway monitoring and opportunities to study student behavior during planning periods. In an academic setting, observation was conducted in the classroom, which while beneficial, was less organic in nature as non-academic settings, since students are constricted by decreed seating as well as the group of students assigned to a given class, both of which are elements out of students' control.

Surveying of my nine-person participant group was divided between two academic years with seven participants being recruited during the Spring semester of

2022, and an additional two participants recruited from another cohort in the Fall of 2023. The survey consisted of twelve questions (see Appendix E). Two of the participants were previous students having taken English 2 with me during the 2021-22 school year, but participated in the study during the 2022-23 school year. Five of the nine participants were enrolled in my English 2 classes in the 2022-23 school year while the other two students took English 2 in the 2023-24 school year. Between the end of the 2022-23 school year and the beginning of the 2023-24 year, the district switched to both a year-round academic calendar and block scheduling. While student and staff schedules changed as a result, this did not have an impact on how participants answered questions in this study.

The selection process involved looking through student demographics identified in the district's PowerSchool software program to see who is listed as Latinx (*Hispanic* is the term assigned to Latinx students in PowerSchool). Once a list of these students was compiled, I asked those people individually if they would be interested in participating in research I was conducting as part of my requirements for a doctoral degree in education. A letter was given to those who expressed interest in learning more about the study. The letter of invitation explained that their participation would include answering survey questions and responding to questions in an interview, if I determined a follow-up interview was warranted.

After reviewing student answers to the twelve survey questions, six respondents were invited to a one-on-one interview to answer questions which were triggered by the responses to survey queries. All students who were asked agreed to be interviewed. Interviews were recorded on an Iphone and transcribed using google voice typing and by

listening to the recordings multiple times and transcribing the material personally. Answers were coded using Saldaña's 2009 edition of *The coding manual for qualitative researchers*, looking for patterns and ways of categorizing information. (See Figures 1 and 2).

Findings

After conducting interviews and reviewing transcripts for themes and commonalities, there were a number of areas that were attention grabbing including participants' feelings of exclusion from the dominant student population, the desire for companionship with other Latinx students, and the predominance of Mexican heritage.

Inclusion in School Culture

When asked how included they feel in school culture when compared to other ethnicities, four of the students said they felt included. Rojelio said he noticed inclusion through art and music. Two said they were not included. Seli said it is rare for Latinx culture to be discussed in school. Dyl said he was neutral on the topic and two identified feelings of both inclusion and exclusion from school culture.

Some responses indicated that the feeling of inclusion was dependent on whether the school was honoring or not honoring a culture at the time of year when various heritages may be acknowledged. Sarita, who identified as both Latinx and Black explained that her biracial background allows her access to both cultures but she also does not feel a sense of full inclusion with either background. Agnes noted that in her middle school, "they would often have a black history month pep rally but not one for Hispanic Heritage Month." She said there are multiple ways she has observed Latinx culture being largely ignored in school culture. Seli indicated a strong lack of inclusion "I

feel as if my culture is not talked about at all. Maybe in a Spanish class or during

Hispanic Heritage Month. Even so, it's only one day compared to other's culture [*sic*]."

Of Hispanic Heritage Month, Anna said "I feel like people act like they know all about it

and they think its [*sic*] not that important since schools never really do anything for it."

Cultural and Ethnic Divisions Among Peers

One of the survey questions which elicited some of the longer responses was: "Do

you believe Latinx students at your school seek friendships/relationships with students

from other cultures? Please explain your answer." Here students seemed to reflect on the

friendships they have as well as those of other Latinx pupils. Anna responded with:

Yes and No. Yes, because Latinx students do get along with other Latinx students,

but sometimes I think we want more friends. When I was younger I was in the

gifted and talented program and there wasn't [*sic*] many Latinx students in there

and many of the kids didn't want to talk to me unless it was to ask what a word in

Spanish means. No, because most Latinx students grew up with the other Latinx

students so they are used to each other and don't want to look for new friends

since we have close relationships with the people we grew up with and are family

friends with.

Although she supported both a yes and no answer, when interviewed, Anna elaborated

more on the idea of Latinx students keeping to themselves in an insular grouping. She

also articulated that while in the gifted and talented program, she noticed that one of the

mothers of a White student also in the program was friendly to all but the Latinx students,

making them feel isolated; a practice which she said extended from third grade through

middle school. Anna went on to say that she often finds herself to be one of very few

students in honors classes and when working in groups often feels she does not have much in common with the other learners.

Division Within the Subgroup

Agnes took her response a step further saying not only do some Latinx students surround themselves with friends of similar backgrounds, but they go so far as to be selective about which country their Latinx friends' families are from.

> I would say I am spilt 50/50 on this one. I often see Latinx students with friends with people of other cultures, who don't judge people on anything else other than their character. But, I also see other [*sic*] who keep their friend group strictly Latinx some of these groups even go as far to keep it just one country instead of all Latin America [*sic*] countries.

Agnes expanded her answer to this inquiry during our interview saying that she sees Mexican students banding together to the exclusion of other Latinx students.

> A friend group, that specifically they're all from Mexico, typically from around the same area [Researcher asks "of Mexico?]. Yes, one girl you know, she went as far as to bully another girl because she was from El Salvador and I guess that didn't sit well with her and she would always say something to her, you know, do stuff just to get a rise outta her.

When asked about this phenomena, Estephania echoed Agnes's theory of subdivisions among Latinx students. While Agnes observed the isolation of a student from El Salvador, Estephania said she finds that Honduran students separate themselves from other Latinx. "They don't blend, they don't mix together." She also noted a gender difference among students from Mexican families, saying that boys tend to honor ethnic

lines more strongly than girls, explaining that while some Latinx girls such as herself make friends with non-Latinx students, "the boys, I see them just hang out with Mexican boys." This observation aligns with the accidental ethnography observed. As students walk into school from the car line there are groups of Latinx boys who typically walk in together. The size of the groups varies, typically from two to five, but the apparent ethnicity of the group never changes. Latinx girls are seen both with other Latinx girls and with White girls or in a combination of students with various backgrounds.

Homogeneous Preferences

When answering the survey, Agnes said she finds comfort in being with students similar to herself.

I would say I do prefer the company of other Latinx students. It is not so much as a race thing but more of a culture thing. I feel that we can make reference to jokes or ask each other how we celebrated holidays that may not be observed here in the United States but important in Latinx culture.

When asked to elaborate about this in an interview Agnes explained the celebration of Children's Day, known as Dia de Niño. She said this Latin American holiday, celebrated April 30th, bonds students to other Latinx pupils because they discuss what they received from their parents to commemorate the day.

Other participants agreed that to at least some extent, that Latinx students preferred the company of other Latinx students. "I try to befriend people of the same culture because I feel closer to them." "Some people want to be just friends with their own kind (not trying to be races) [*sic*]." "Some prefer people with the same culture." "It depends on how they are and who they are comfortable with." When interviewed,

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Eduardo made a point of saying that while he is interested in friendships with people from all backgrounds, he believes this is not the case among other Latinx. Like other students he mentioned a division saying "some Hispanics don't really get along with other Hispanics, but some do."

Estephania said she sometimes withholds information from White friends which she shares freely with other Latinx students. One example she cited is food eaten by Latinx families. Experience demonstrated to her that revealing she ate some Latinx foods elicited negative comments. This occurred when she told some non-Latinx students about how much she enjoyed eating cow tongue. She said that hearing "'eww, you're disgusting'" let her know it was best if she reserved the discussion of some cultural practices for her Latinx friends exclusively.

Branching Out

Not all participants share the opinion that Latinx prefer to be with other Latinx students. Rojelio said he sees Latinx students enjoying the company of a variety of people.

I do believe Latinx students at my school seek friendships/relationships with other cultures. Daily whenever I'm at school in any class, I would usually observe my Latinx friends socializing very well with other people of different races, and culture[s]. When my Latinx friends are outside, or in our school's cafeteria they are having fun and great friendship with other students of different backgrounds. When my Latinx friends are in music class they get along well, and increase their relationships with other students of different backgrounds through music.

Comfort In Alikeness

When asked about their personal preferences for friendships with students from other backgrounds, six of the nine participants said they prefer friendships with other Latinx students. Estephania, an ELL student said "I feel that they judge my accent." She went on to say "I do better if I have other Latins [*sic*] in my class because they know the struggle [….] that makes me more secure, more safe."

Sarita said she seeks friendships with Latinx because "some people I can relate more to then [*sic*] others." Anna said she feels isolated when not in the company of other Latinx.

Since I grew up with most of the Latinx students in the school I feel more social with them than students of other races. Sometimes I feel a little lonely when I'm in a group where there's no Latinx students because I don't feel like I [have] much in common with them.

Seli cited biased treatment by non-Latinx as her reason for seeking the exclusive friendships of other Latinx. "Throughout the school, people of other ethnicities tend to be prejudice[d] and discriminatory towards Hispanics, throwing slurs around and at times people think its [*sic*] humorous. I feel welcomed by the same ethnicity."

The Ethnicity to English Class Link

The responses to the prompt: *How do you think one's background impacts how they relate to characters and people you read about in English class? Please explain* elicited empathetic answers such as Anna's.

Someone's background impacts how they relate to characters because when you know the story of your parents and the things they had to go through just to give

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you what you have now and more than they had, and if you see a character with

the same background you feel like you understand how they feel so you feel a

connection to them.

Anna explained that her father immigrated alone to the U.S. at age 15. He went to New

York where he found employment and sent money home to his parents so they and his

younger brother along with the participant's mother and older sister could come to the

U.S. After living in New York, the family resettled in South Carolina where Anna's

father built a landscaping business "from scratch." Her father came to rely on Anna and

her sister for translation services to communicate with customers. Anna continues to help

him with invoices and accompanies her parents to doctor visits where she acts as a

translator to be sure her parents understand medical instructions.

Because she has lived through the deportation of close family members, Anna

seeks a career as an immigration attorney. When an uncle was deported, the family

business suffered as he was also one of the landscape workers. Anna said this was one of

the reasons their father was not able to be home during much of her childhood, he

sometimes had to do additional work when family members were taken away by the

immigration service. Having this background seemed to help Anna identify with

characters read about in English class who also face conflicts. Her answer about one's

background being meaningful to relating to characters is more focused on connection to

the character's dilemma, rather than the ethnicity of the character.

Recognition of Disparities

Estephania identified a distinct *dis*connect to characters based on ethnicity saying

"many Latin [*sic*] people may not relate to a character because us as Latinx come from

different households then [*sic*] White people and they have more opportunities then [*sic*] us Latinx." In the current English two curriculum there are far more references to White and Black characters than there are to Latinx characters. In English two, readings include the writings of White American, Shirley Jackson. Her stories focus on White characters typically in small New England towns.

There is a Black history unit in which nonfictional writing is studied. A second fictional unit includes the 1937 book, *Of Mice and Men* by White author, John Steinbeck whose main characters are also White. The story does feature one Black man, but no Latinx as ranch workers in California during the 1930s, even though it is widely known that Latinx workers helped shape the state's reputation for agriculture (University of California, n.d.).

There is also a brief unit on the Holocaust when nonfiction is revisited. For this unit, excerpts from the book *Night* (1960) by author, Elie Wiesel are read in class. The Greek play, *Antigone*, written by Sophocles in the 5th century B.C.E. is studied for the unit on Greek drama, and Shakespeare is studied through the reading of the 1599 play, *Julius Caesar.* There is typically an attempt to read Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960) but often run out of time and the Professional Learning Community (PLC) settles on showing students the film in lieu of reading the novel. In poetry, the unit stresses the works of White poet Billy Collins. One poem, *Cloudy Day,* first published in 1977 by Mexican American poet Jimmy Santiago Baca is a rare exception in the collection of studied poems. But rather than shed light on Mexican American heritage, the poem focuses on Santiago Baca's five years of incarceration at the Arizona State Prison (*Episode 1143 | Jimmy Santiago Baca*, 2018). An objective analysis of the literature read

in English 2 makes it easy to understand how some Latinx students like Estephania, may feel that among the greater opportunities White students have, is the liberty to see themselves represented positively in the material; a rarity for a Latinx student.

At the suggestion of a teacher in the English 2 PLC, the faculty inserted a story not normally included in the curriculum called *The Night Face Up* by Argentine educated writer Julio Cortázar. Estephania said she felt a sense of pride reading the story because the story has "Latin vibes" and she understood that the Latinx author had achieved great success by having a story of his included in the curriculum.

Agnes was in English two during the previous year and did not experience that text. She explained that upbringing along with personal encounters with others determine how literature is interpreted.

I do think one's background impacts how someone relates to what they read about in English class. We all go through different things and we are all raised differently so we all process information differently. Some might relate closely to the situation while others may feel indifferent about it.

Eduardo agreed that there is leeway when it comes to the interpretation of literature, but he said for the most part one's background is not necessarily important for illuminating the meaning of a text.

Well if they have a difficult background it could affect how they talk to other people and it could not because some people or I would say most people don't really focus on their backgrounds, they just focus on being with their friends and spending a goo[d] day at school.

Eduardo explained that motivation from his family helps keep him focused on achieving academically.

Connection to Literature

When asked if they feel a connection to characters and people they read about in English class, five students said they feel connected because of the voice writers gave their characters, traits they see in themselves or those close to them. Sarita said she does not identify with nonfictional characters but did feel a bond with the people she read about during Black history month. She noted "Josephine Baker, with her reference to France in comparison to America. Cause [*sic*] with America some people tend to categorize people based on what they look [like] or what they assume someone might be, so as someone who's also mixed race, you kinda [*sic*]get like fast judgments, too fast, and assume you can't be something or that you're supposed to do something." Sarita also said the void she saw in literature studied in English class was Asian. She mentioned she would like to read stories about Chinese culture. Of the 1355 students, only five students at this school are identified as Asian (U.S. department of education, 2021). Therefore it may not be surprising that students are curious about a subgroup prominent in other parts of the United States, but not in this southeastern district.

In describing his relationship to characters, Rojelio said "the connection that I feel is the feeling of sympathy, or empathy for the antagonist, and the protagonist when they fail to accomplish a goal attempted to be accomplished for good reason." Rojelio did not mention the desire to see Latinx characters in literature when responding to this question, but does address the idea in another question about the type of literature he would like to read in class.

Anna said she connected with the character of Curley's wife in *Of Mice and Men*: "She wasn't really paid attention to and tried to get people to acknowledge her, is [*sic*] the same way some Latinx students, especially the women and first generation feel with their parents." Anna was asked about this in my interview with her. She explained

when it comes to emotional support

> especially when I was younger [….] my dad was always out and whenever he
> was out he was like 'oh sorry,' I really didn't get a proper apology, he was
> like 'here take some money, go buy yourself something.' That's all I got. [...]
> Instead of being emotionally there I just got gifts.

Anna is the youngest of two girls and felt that getting attention from her father would be easier if she were a boy, which she said she believes is not unusual in the Latinx community. So while the characters read about are not Latinx, Anna found another way of seeing herself in literature.

Like Rojelio and Anna, the traits of a character create a connection for Eduardo. He related that he understood Cassius's jealousy in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* because he knows he can feel envy at times and saw how Cassius's jealousy motivated some of the character's actions. Eduardo also mentioned that he prefers English written texts over those written in Spanish.

Desire for Representation in Literature

When asked if there was a type of literature the participant would like to read in English class, Rojelio replied he would like to see "South American literature, the type of literature involving culture, myths, and old tell to tell [*sic*] stories, and famous historical people in South America." Seli answered "Hispanic Literature! The literature that was

made by Hispanics throughout crucial points in their history. Mainly, the type of literature Chicanos made during the Chicano Movement." Seli expanded her response in an interview. She explained that while African American history is explored during Black history month; contributions to society, as well as hardships suffered by Latinx are largely ignored in school.

> Mexicans, Hispanics, like everybody went through something in America. I try to talk about that with peers and stuff like that and sometimes they're like what's the Chicano movement? […] I know a lot of people are just very uneducated about Hispanics, Hispanic culture, Hispanic literature, and I kinda just want that to be represented.

Seli explained that because her parents grew up in southern California, they were informed about, and educated her on the Chicano movement. She went on to say that English and history classes focus on stories from Europe and Asia and that the only time she recalls feeling represented was in marching band when the band performed a song in honor of the traditional Mexican day-of-the-dead holiday.

The majority of participants (six) said there was not any literature not currently taught which they would like to see included in the curriculum. In an interview, Estephania explained an internal conflict when it comes to the potential reading of Latinx themed literature in her English class. She expressed discomfort with the idea of the class's eyes all on her which she fears would be the case if the class reads about Mexican or Latinx cultural practices. However, she also said that the exposure of such literature in the curriculum could empower Latinx students.

Maybe they would be more interested in their culture. Cause [*sic*] I feel like since

they think people judge them they try to stay more away from their culture and be

more like the White students. Or like different races. So I feel like if we talk more

about our culture as well they would not be as insecure to talk about it and feel

more confident about being Latin [*sic*].

Estephania and Seli's answers align with Adams and Goldbard's (1995) theoretical

framework of cultural democracy which seeks to honor cultures in school settings so as to

give students a sense of pride about their heritage. Agnes said she would like to see

literature about ancient Greece. As mentioned, during an interview Sarita said she would

like to read Chinese literature.

Recognition of Disparities

Estephania identified a distinct *dis*connect to characters based on ethnicity saying

"many Latin [*sic*] people may not relate to a character because us as Latinx come from

different households then [*sic*] White people and they have more opportunities then [*sic*]

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Latinx as ranch workers in California during the 1930s, even though it is widely known

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Eduardo explained that motivation from his family helps keep him focused on achieving academically.

Dual Language Instruction

A survey question asked participants if they would prefer instruction in their native language to which Eduardo answered that he would not, saying if he needed help he would prefer it came from family. The question specifically stated: *Please only answer this question if you do not feel you have command of English: Would you prefer to have instruction in your native language? Please explain why or why not.* Six participants responded the question was not applicable to them. Most likely this is because they feel they have a strong command of the English language.

Seli replied that there were occasions in which she felt she could benefit from instruction in Spanish, and Rojelio replied that while he had no personal need for dual language instruction, he was empathetic to others who may not understand English as well as he does saying

> I would prefer to have instruction in my native language because it would make it easier for me to understand the material I learn in my classes. Having instruction in a different language that I don't usually speak, or know well would give me difficulty in understanding the school material I'm learning.

Increasing Academic Performance

Rojelio expanded on his answer in addressing the final question on the survey: *What can be done to increase academic performance for Latinx students?* Rojelio said "I recommend giving instruction in the native language of a Latinx student that they prefer to be taught in their classes, and introducing culture, stories, and history about other regions, and country's [*sic*] from South America and nearby Latin countries." Rojelio's suggestion of both dual language instruction and attention to Latinx cultural traditions

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was somewhat echoed by Manny who said a dual language approach could help some by having literature "in English but also a translated text version of it off to the side that's in Spanish."

Seli replied that while her desire for dual language instruction is only periodic, she knows that many others would benefit from constant support through easier to understand instruction. She would like to see schools "provide assistance for them [*sic*] with language barriers and understanding. It's obvious if you can't understand English that you won't get anywhere in an English class. So giving assistance to them will help. As well, people that are bilingual can also sometimes have issues understanding." Seli explained that she communicates with both of her parents primarily in Spanish, and she sometimes forgets particular English words. She said that having dual language instruction could be a boost for her, even though she is not an ELL student. The majority of participants cited giving some type of English enrichment to increase academic performance for Latinx students.

Summary

The study determined that some Latinx students would like to see their heritage represented at a greater level in school culture. Some participants would also like to see Latinx literature infused into the curriculum. Not all students agree on these points. Some students do not notice a disparity in the way Latinx heritage is treated on campus.

Some Latinx students prefer the company of other Latinx students because of common understandings of holidays, foods and other cultural events. Participants recognize that among Latinx students there are divisions of friendships based on country-

of-origin lines. But there is not strict adherence to this, and friendships do occur between Latinx on both an intra and inter-cultural level.

Limitations

This study was limited because of a lack of a broad cross section of students. Many students whose input would have been valuable chose not to participate. Reasons for the lack of participation may include fear regarding documentation status. This is problematic because as this population continues to grow, we can expect those who are not documented to continue to enter schools, but this group may be fearful about speaking up for themselves. But it is important for school districts to understand the needs of this growing subgroup. It is also important to note that these findings are based on the interpretations of the select group of participants and may not be applicable to other Latinx students in other school districts.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS, INTERPRETATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The need to give greater attention to the requirements for Latinx student success is well established and continues to grow along with the Latinx student population (Arbelo-Marrero, 2016; Darder, 1993; Manzano-Sanchez et al., 2019; Romero, 2017; Valenzuela, 2009). Ignoring this subgroup's culture in school can result in alienating students who could otherwise be engaged and thrive. By ensuring that Latinx students feel a sense of belonging in school, academic success and the rewards associated with it are far more likely. In many cases Latinx students do not feel the same sense of inclusion as their non-Latinx peers. The national center of educational statistic's condition of education report (2021) ranks Latinx (Hispanic) students as having one of the highest dropout rates in the nation. Without intervention this subgroup may remain at risk for maintaining or increasing the dropout rate.

According to our district's office of accountability and assessment (2023) the Latinx population is the fastest growing population at our school, growing from just 6.5% in 2012 to the current percentage of 18.76 (see Table 2). This growth outpaces the growth of other subgroups by a substantial margin. Some Latinx students are newcomers to the United States, some are U.S. born but have at least one parent who immigrated to the U.S. from a Latinx country, and some students have family who have been in the United

States for multiple generations. The background of Latinx students is as diverse as other immigrant groups, and like other immigrant groups, there are many commonalities.

Responsiveness

Examining how school is responding to the demographics change is critical to meeting the needs of this growing population. Latinx students may not see themselves in the curriculum and therefore may not feel part of school culture. Skerrett (2009) posited that Anglo-centric literature is the base for standardized testing in the United States. Since teachers must *teach to the test* to help their students succeed on standardized tests, Latinx students may feel less a part of school than their White or Black peers. We do a study of Black history with associated texts, but there is not a unit of study which reflects the contributions of Latinx to American culture.

The framework of cultural democracy calls for the "**active participation** in community cultural life" and "**enabling people to participate in policy decisions**" (*What Is "Cultural Democracy"? [Sic]*, 1998, bold in original). Students in my study expressed the desire to see themselves in literature and represented in school culture, the *active participation* described as cultural democracy. By giving students the voice they seek in helping to determine curriculum, we would be giving Latinx students a voice in the *policy decisions* referred to in cultural democracy. Zacarian and Staehr Fenner (2020), Darder (1993), and Valenzuela (2009) all posited that schools (inadvertently or with intention) seek to subtract Latinx heritage from students and argue that this hurts the Latinx student. Rather than subtract heritage, this study indicates that adding Latinx literature could be an effective way of engaging at-risk Latinx students.

Freire (1970/2014) explained that critical pedagogy requires "*reflection* and *action* directed at the structures to be transformed" (p.126, italics in original). This action research project was an opportunity to reflect on a population which does not always have light cast on its needs. Reflection in recent times has amounted to news reports about illegal crossings at the United States border with Mexico with little attention paid to students of Latinx heritage (Chesky, 2024; *Illegal border crossings from Mexico reach highest on record in December before January lull*, 2024).

Before reformative action can occur, it is important to hear from our Latinx population and understand what this group feels would be instrumental in helping them achieve academic parity with non-Latinx peers. In this study, students who were identified as Latinx in PowerSchool had the opportunity to respond to questions meant to gain understanding of Latinx student needs in school, and help stakeholders determine what changes may be considered to address these needs.

The survey participants took part in allowed them to state in their own words responses to questions about inclusivity, curriculum, and social customs while also giving demographic information about their country of origin, their parents' countries of origin, and the language spoken at home. Answers to questions sparked interest for further information which was obtained through the interview process. After transcribing interview texts, I was able to see some commonalities using Saldaña's (2009) method of coding for qualitative researchers. The most common conclusion drawn from the interviews and survey questions is that Latinx students wished to see their culture represented in our curriculum. Other conclusions include a greater level of comfort with

other Latinx students compared to students of other races, and the desire to see Latinx heritage celebrated at a school-wide level.

Failures

A 2022 article in *The State* newspaper cited numerous districts in South Carolina failing Latinx students by not providing legally required translation services for families needing to understand their child's educational progress (Eisner & Smolcic Larson, 2022). According to the article bilingual students would often be recruited to fill in for trained translators. In 2021, a settlement was reached between the United States Department of Justice and the Charleston County School District over this same issue (Charleston County School District Agrees to Provide Language Access for Limited English Proficient Parents, 2021).

When districts fail to provide the legally required services for their populations, it is difficult to imagine a scenario in which districts make sure their Latinx students feel a sense of inclusion, see their heritage represented in schools, or incorporate Latinx literature into the curriculum.

Questions for Research

The original question for research was: How does a Latinx student experience a high school English class in a mono-lingual district? The answer to the question can depend on how acculturated the Latinx student is, along with other factors such as family involvement, the family's level of acculturation, the connection the student feels with their school, school-recognition of Latinx culture, and a host of other contributing factors.

Student participants explained the importance of seeing themselves represented in school culture. Agnes said she felt it was unfair that there was a pep rally at her middle

school for Black Heritage month, but no such celebration took place to honor Latinx culture. She did not express any wish for fewer Black culture celebrations but did desire parity for seeing her own culture honored in school. This student was not unique in expressing that other minority cultures seemed to have greater school acknowledgement than Latinx heritage.

Implications for Teaching Practice

By focusing teachers' attention on the needs of Latinx students I anticipate greater empathy toward this subgroup. Since at this time there is only one Latinx teacher on our staff, and no Latinx administrators, professional development through action research will give staff belonging to other subgroups an opportunity to understand what needs the Latinx student community has and is a first step in addressing those needs. By developing empathy and understanding for Latinx students, teachers will be in a better position to find ways of making connections and building relationships, a long-held and well-studied theory of academic success (Pandolpho, 2020).

By giving Latinx students the opportunity for greater engagement, these students can hone their literature analysis skills, because they will have the opportunity to see themselves in stories read in class. By seeing themselves in stories read in school, Latinx students can develop a greater sense of inclusion in the school community. With the added benefits of Latinx community members being visible in school, the message to Latinx students will be that their heritage is valued by school leaders.

Esteban and Alfredo

Estaban (a pseudonym) was a student of mine during the 2021-22 school year as I undertook my action research journey. Estaban is the chief reason I selected the topic I

did. He was newly arrived from Honduras and spoke no English. He was placed in my English 2 class and created something of a conundrum for me as his teacher. It was expected that he keep pace with his native English-speaking peers, even though he could not read, write, or speak English. I would sometimes ask another Spanish speaking student to translate for Esteban, but I knew it was somewhat of a burden for the translating student who had his own studies to concentrate on. I provided texts in Spanish, but Esteban could never understand as the class delved into conversations about whether George made the right decision at the end of Steinbeck's novella, *Of Mice and Men*. I would watch Esteban's face as the class moved into debate and knew he was unable to comprehend what was being said. I thought of the unfairness of his situation and how frustrating it must be to be in a room in which you are the only one who does not understand what is transpiring.

Because our district has one-to-one technology, Esteban would retreat into watching soccer or playing games on his laptop. I knew that as his teacher it was my responsibility to ensure he was not using school devices for entertainment. But rather than admonish him for this, I chose to allow it. Without the distractions, his isolation from the rest of the class would be even more frustrating for him.

In chapter two under the subheading *The Benefits of Culture and Native Language,* I mention a student named Alfredo. The section addresses the wisdom of meeting students where they are and making the most of what they bring with them. It was suggested that Alfredo's parents could instruct students about agriculture and that the school's response to Alfredo's love of soccer gave him something to be excited about in school.

I sometimes wonder if I had made more of an effort to connect with Esteban's family, if I could have found out something about him which could have gotten him more excited about education. I also wonder if a dual-language curriculum in which he could learn in Spanish might have triggered the desire for him to stay in school. He, however did not do so. He did not return to school the following year.

Action Plan

To promote equity, I propose that one or more works which are Latinx centric should be infused into all core high school English classes. This is something which could begin at the district level and perhaps be implemented by the state as the need for attention to Latinx education becomes more apparent in other geographical areas. Gabriel (2017) said it is important for educators to recognize "that a cultural mismatch exists between most school leaders and their student and family population" (p. 100). My building has a Latinx student population of 254 (*Search for Public Schools - School Detail for Midland Valley High*, 2022), with only one Latinx teacher and no Latinx administrators (*Midland Valley High / Homepage*, 2022). To help remedy this lack of representation we could read stories by Latinx authors about Latinx cultures. The work should be representative and respectful of Latinx culture and allow non-Latinx students an authentic look inside Latinx-American life. Authors such as Sandra Cisneros and Daisy Hernández could be read and their work studied to see how their stories reflect (or do not reflect) the culture of Latinx students. Cisneros's 1984 book *The House on Mango Street* is an example of a work with a variety of short stories which show glimpses of Latinx life. Daisy Hernández's work touches on immigration status, something many

Latinx students may find parallels their own family experiences. Another potential remedy would include active recruitment of Latinx staff.

Class discussions would invite Latinx students to share how what they read is seen or not in their own experiences. While no student would be pressured into contributing, the opportunity may help students feel more comfortable about sharing aspects of their culture. Non-Latinx students would have the chance to learn about their peers' cultures and develop compassion and understanding through exposure to Latinx practices. Gabriel (2017) explained "educational equity is the responsibility of educators for supporting the high- level learning of all students" (p. 100). By studying Latinx authors, such as Nikki Barthelmess, Natalia Sylvester, and Jennifer De Leon, Latinx students would feel more of a connection to and part of school culture. Jewell (2020) explained that institutions such as schools depend on the people within them to either maintain or dismantle preconceived ideas about other cultures. By breaking down cultural barriers, all students would have greater insight about Latinx culture and practices, which would help break apart biased ideas about Latinx culture and pave the way toward eliminating prejudices and creating equity.

Building Progress

To support this change I would enlist the help and support of my building principal and the district-level high school English language arts (ELA) curriculum specialist. Enlisting the help of my principal would be instrumental. I would want his support because our school leads the district in the number of Latinx students enrolled in high school (*Search for Public Schools - Search Results*, 2022). For this reason, I would like his assistance in convincing district leaders, including the high school ELA

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curriculum specialist of the importance of integrating Latinx texts into our classroom activities.

The help of the high school ELA curriculum specialist would be invaluable. In addition to setting guidelines for what is taught in district high schools' English departments, he could be instrumental in acting as a liaison to the superintendent and school board members. If there are objections or a request for documentation of how this would benefit students and raise test scores, the ethos of the high school ELA curriculum specialist could help explain how test scores may be raised. I understand from my principal that high test scores are important to the district and the information is reflected on public records (*Academic Achievement - SC School Report Cards*, 2023). Because the ELA curriculum specialist is familiar to the superintendent and school board members, he would lend credibility to the idea of amending our curriculum. The building principal would also lend credibility as he lives the experience of working with our growing Latinx population and could help emphasize the need for change.

Community can be involved by volunteering as guest speakers when Latinx holidays occur during the school year. The guest speakers could be family members of Latinx students or other stakeholders with knowledge of Latinx cultural practices. An example of this would be having parents of Latinx students explain Children's Day, known in Mexico and other Latin American countries as el día de los niños (*Children's Day 2024 in Mexico*, 2023). This is a holiday unfamiliar to many but widely celebrated in other parts of the world and among Latinx families in the United States. Mendoza-Denton (2011) posited that exposure to other people who are outside of our own culture is one of the best ways of conquering prejudices. Miller Dyce and Longmire-Avital (2017) said

"engaging diverse families and communities in schooling is paramount in order to close the achievement gap" (p. 127). Family involvement is critical to students' academic achievement so having a family member volunteer to share their holiday traditions benefits all students. Latinx students see their culture celebrated at school, their family's involvement helps boost achievement, and non-Latinx students learn about cultural practices they may be unfamiliar with. This will allow all parties to enjoy academic success.

Implementation

I would like to begin the next academic year with a school-wide call to guardians and parents letting them know about our plans for bringing in guest speakers and the dates we are interested in filling. This way adults could plan for being in school for part of the day in the near future. I will provide a list for the front office so that as calls come in they can collect pertinent information such as which day the volunteer is available, for which hours, contact information and whether the volunteer will need school to provide anything to make their visit successful. If enough adults are able to help, I would assign two volunteers to each classroom for the period or block. If we do not have enough volunteers, I would have classes double or triple up in an available space so as many students as possible could hear from a community member about Latinx celebrations. By getting a list of volunteers early in the school year, I could plan the space needed appropriately.

Teacher Professional Development

I would also address teachers in our first teacher workday and introduce an action research professional learning project in which teachers could create a topic to study or select from a list of topics which might include:

- Determining the benefits, possible risks and costs of dual language education.

- Latinx literature for students.

- Inclusivity in the classroom.

Teachers would be welcome to suggest a topic which interests them. By introducing the professional learning opportunity at a staff meeting, we "motivate and challenge faculty, and provide a sense of the larger community [as well as] set the tone for the year and remind teachers about the value of public education" (Fisher & Frey, 2014, p. 219). In addition to motivating teachers, introducing professional learning at the beginning of the school year allows teachers to observe their students and determine a topic they feel would benefit their practices.

I would ask each teacher to begin their research with personal awareness. Szpara (2017) posited that change begins with self-reflection. She listed websites in which people can take self-assessments which examine underlying and outward prejudices. By realizing where we stand when considering others, we have a better understanding of our own inherent beliefs. Reflecting on our own ethoses can be a first step toward more equitable treatment of others. I would ask teachers to assess themselves using the resources identified by Szpara (2017) including the Implicit Association Test and

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Understanding Prejudice: Exercises and Demonstrations (Project Implicit, 2011), so they can have a greater understanding of their own prejudices.

As Youngs and Lane (2014) pointed out teachers can work on action research individually or as part of a team. Working as a team allows for teachers to collaborate and learn from one another as they experience the research process. Like choosing the topic to investigate, deciding on individual or team research gives teachers a sense of ownership. If one chooses to work with a partner, duties can be divided with a sense of accountability to the collaborator. If one chooses to work alone, there may be a strong sense of direction about a subject. Youngs and Lane (2014) explained that action research proved successful in the Boston area because "teachers chose research topics that were relevant to their own classrooms and schools" (p. 290). Teachers are the ones who are best to determine the needs they observe in their own classes, so allowing them to select topics for research is logical.

Teachers in my state are required to submit evidence annually of student growth to the department of education. The annual data is gathered at three intervals during the school year. The student learning objectives (SLO) are stated early in the term, are reviewed at a midpoint, and summarized at the end of the academic term. In addition to the SLO, the department of education in my state allows teachers to substitute a teacher leadership goal (TLG) (*Guidance on creating teacher leadership goals*, 2021). This alternative to the SLO would allow teachers who have made gains in Latinx student achievement to mentor others interested in this objective. This might be a good option since the SLO looks at the impact a teacher had on a whole class rather than just a segment of the class. Of course teachers with a high Latinx population could still use

study methods in creating a valid SLO, perhaps testing Latinx students on skills-based items after reading an Anglo-oriented text, and then test them using a Latinx-oriented text to see if Latinx students improve their scores. Of course assessments would need to be checked for validity and reliability (Brookhart & Nitko, 2019) to ensure accurate data.

Limitations of the Study

Among the limitations of this study is a lack of more diverse participants. It is right to acknowledge the trepidation of some potential participants who may not have legal immigration status. Taking part in a study which is housed through a major government supported educational institution may strike fear into some who are hoping to remain in the United States without the documentation allowing them to do so legally. For this reason it is possible that Latinx students who could have contributed to the study chose not to participate, not wishing to cause immigration difficulties for their families or themselves.

Another limitation of this study is the lack of participants along the academic spectrum. The students who participated in the study are among the higher achieving students I have taught during my tenure at this school. While the survey was offered to a variety of students, those who chose not to participate included lower achieving students. As a result of this lack of academic diversity, a smaller spectrum of voices was heard from. Since this study seeks to elevate the scholarly performance of Latinx students, it is important to note that this study falls short of representing students from the lower end of the Latinx, scholastic spectrum; perhaps the most critical of voices to hear from. Because the research, survey and interview questions were created by an etic researcher, the study may not address issues important to the Latinx community and not articulated

in this study. There may be other, more pressing educational deficiencies which, as a person without Latinx heritage, may not be as visible to me as it might be to someone who grew up in this ethnic group.

It is important to recognize that this study was conducted in a specific locale and results may be different in other regions and with different participants. We must also consider the political climate of the region and timeframe of the study. During the time of the study, issues such as illegal border crossings and ways of stemming the number of people crossing at the United States southern border dominated news stories (Rahman, 2023) and may have had an impact on students' feelings.

It must also be noted that two of the participants have both Latinx and Black heritage and therefore their experiences may not be as representative of Latinx students who do not identify with another culture. While it is important to hear the voices of students who share more than one heritage, those voices may not represent the experience of someone who identifies exclusively as Latinx.

Future Research

The opportunities for future studies are numerous which is why this study lends itself well to the idea of further action research through professional development. In studying this demographic, we as educators need to advocate best practices for students such as Esteban who moved to a district which could not meet his educational needs. We should also want to advance the needs of students like Agnes who feel more comfortable with other Latinx students because non-Latinx students do not know her culture's holidays; and students like Stefania, who expressed how she shuts down rather than face negative comments about Mexican cuisine.

Greater exposure to Latinx heritage helps Latinx students feel more at home in school and allows their non-Latinx peers to learn about practices, holidays, and foods they may be unfamiliar with. Increasing exposure to a non-dominant culture also empowers other minority heritage students to understand that their own cultures and practices may be different from the dominant group but are also worthwhile and deserving of attention. Because Black history month is acknowledged in schools, it was clear to Agnes that her own culture could be equally celebrated but was not. With additional study and focus on Latinx and other minority groups we could help non hegemonic students identify closely with school culture making academic success more likely for all.

Mirroring America

Recent research from the Pew Research Center indicates that newer Latinx immigrants are expanding beyond traditionally favored states such as California, Texas and Florida. 20% of the Latinx population in my state of South Carolina are recent arrivals (Haner & Lopez, 2023). The Pew Research Center defines recent arrivals as "foreign-born Hispanics who have been in the U.S. for five years or less" (Haner & Lopez, 2023, sec. 7). In Ohio and Louisiana, the number of recent arrivals comprise over 25% of all Latinx in those states.

Policies of education need to make allowances to help our newer Latinx students feel welcome and celebrated. By ensuring school is a place where newer Latinx students feel part of the community, we stand a far better chance of turning around the trend of Latinx student dropout rates (*Coe - Status Dropout Rates*, 2023) if we address the needs of this population. This could be in the form of additional Latinx resources and literature

in high school English classrooms, the possibility of dual-language education, greater emphasis on teaching Latinx culture to the dominant population and perhaps other interventions not cited in this report. Hearing more from our Latinx community can help guide educators toward making policy changes which benefit Latinx students and thereby the educational system as a whole.

Researcher's Positionality Contributes to Findings of Scapegoating

As a Jew and the relative of many who were murdered in the Holocaust, my positionality is a key posture to recognize scapegoating. Former United States representative Ron Paul also recognized how the Latinx community is used as scapegoats. While speaking to a Latinx political organization in 2012, Paul said that during difficult economic times, societies look for scapegoats, as was the case in Europe during the 1930s, and he explained, in the United States at the time of his remark (La Ganga, 2012).

At the height of The Great Depression, Herbert Hoover's administration sought to deport those of Mexican heritage and prevent those in the United States legally from gainful employment (Bernard, 2024). In 2020, when COVID-19 created havoc for American health and the economy, the governor of Arizona blamed Mexican-Americans for the outbreak (Quezada, 2020). In 2015, Presidential candidate, Donald Trump said that Mexico was sending rapists to the United States (ABC News, 2016). He would go on to win the presidency.

When hate-speech and acts targeting minorities are rewarded with political gain, it is little wonder that politicians employ the tactic. Whether the nation if facing an economic, health or other crisis, it is up to its citizens to guard against such rhetoric and

look out for the well-being of minority citizens. As educators, it is our responsibility to recognize gaps in educational opportunities and ensure that our students are receiving equitable experiences in the classroom.

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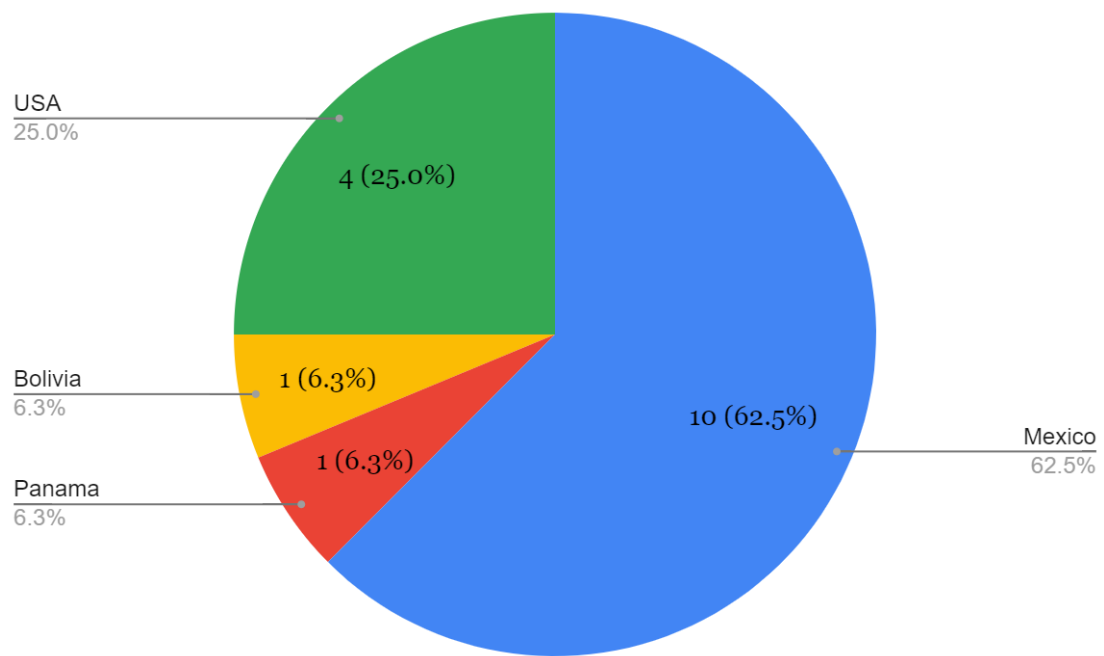
APPENDIX A

STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS BY YEAR

Table A.1:
Student Demographics by Year

Year	Total	Asian	Black	Amer Indian/ Alaska	Native Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander	White	Hispanic/ Latinx	Two or More Races
2012-13	1,133	9	270	0	2	762	74	16
2013-14	1,179	9	283	2	1	786	81	17
2014-15	1,236	6	304	4	1	810	94	17
2015-16	1,313	5	350	4	0	818	111	25
2016-17	1,386	8	374	6	1	833	132	32
2017-18	1,388	11	365	4	1	832	144	31
2018-19	1,259	9	330	4	1	732	146	37
2019-20	1,224	8	302	1	1	697	174	41
2020-21	1,211	6	306	2	2	665	195	35
2021-22	1,331	6	363	3	2	672	254	41
2022-23	1,415	8	412	5	2	673	267	48

PARENTS' COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN AND LANGUAGES SPOKEN AT HOME

Figure B.1: Parents' Country of Origin
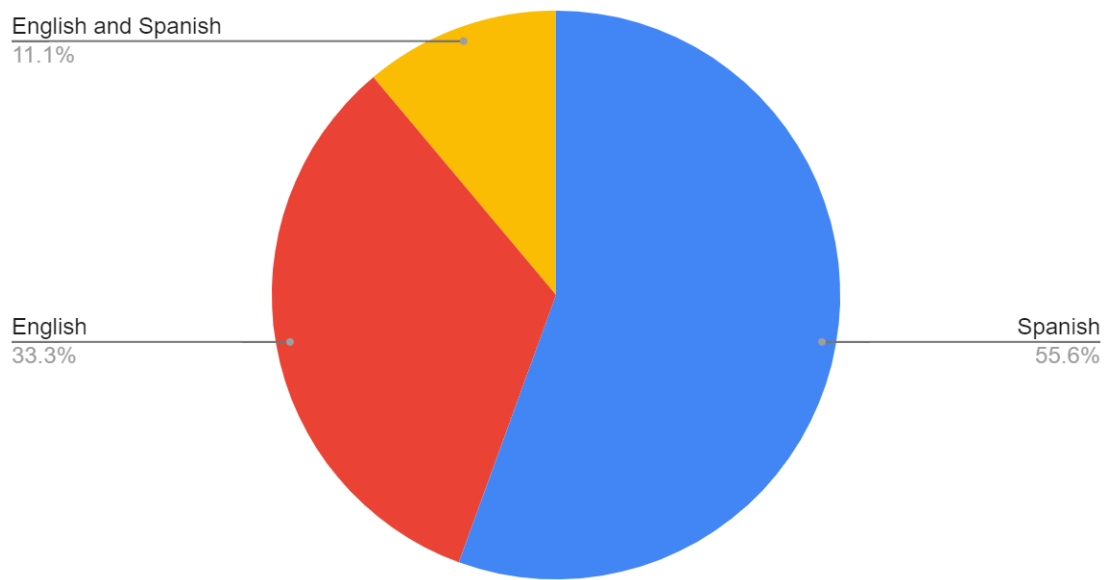
Figure B.2: Primary Language Spoken at Home

APPENDIX C

SURVEY QUESTIONS

a. In which country were you born?

b. In which country were your parents born?

c. At home, which language is spoken most frequently?

d. Describe how included in school culture you feel when compared with students of other ethnicities and backgrounds.

e. Describe the connection you feel or do not feel to the characters and people you read about in your English class.

f. Is there literature you wish you read in English class which is not currently taught? If so, describe this literature.

g. Do you believe Latinx students at your school seek friendships/relationships with students from other cultures? Please explain your answer.

h. Do you prefer the company of other Latinx students over the companionship of White, Black, Native American, Multiracial and Asian students?

i. How do you think one's background impacts how they relate to characters and people you read about in English class? Please explain.What can be done to increase academic performance for Latinx students?
And, for ELLs:

j. Would you prefer to have instruction in your native language?