

Supportive Schooling Practices That Support Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students' Preparation for College

Kristin Percy Calaff

Given the challenges of a culturally and linguistically diverse student body, one exemplary high school has developed supportive schooling practices that provide academic rigor and access for all students while embracing their linguistic and cultural identities. This ethnographic study documents how this school contributed to the college preparation of nine Latino immigrant students. Implications also address the need for partnerships with university and community resources that assist students and families in the college preparation process.

Keywords: *college preparation; Latinos; diversity; best practices*

Faced with increased accountability in public education, schools are feeling the pressure to raise the achievement of historically underachieving groups now more than ever. Latinos have one of the highest dropout rates of any group. In the year 2000, only 64% of Latinos had completed high school as compared with 92% of Whites and 84% of African Americans aged 18 to 24 years (U.S. Department of Education, 2003). Yet the added pressure of high-stakes testing may actually increase the high dropout rate for Latinos and other students if practices that develop academic success for these students are not implemented. Although many studies have focused on institutional practices that contribute to these high dropout rates and leave fewer than one in four Latino students prepared to enter a 4-year college (López, 2002; Swail, Cabrera, & Lee, 2004; Valenzuela, 1999), few researchers have examined practices that offer promise for reversing the trend. This ethnographic study was designed to explore how some students manage to beat the odds to graduate and enroll in a 4-year university by examining the contributions of their home, school, college preparation program, and community. To answer this question, I spent more than a year shadowing nine Latino high school students from immigrant families, attending their high school classes and activities, participating in a college preparation program with them, and conducting interviews and focus groups with

Correspondence concerning this article may be sent to Kristin Percy Calaff, kcalaff@u.washington.edu.

the students and their parents. Although the study also included data on these students' lives at home, in their community, and at the university-sponsored college preparation program, this article focuses on the role of their exemplary multicultural high school in helping them prepare for college.

Theoretical Framework

Based on a larger study, this research was designed as a multisited ethnography using Phelan, Davidson, and Yu's Multiple Worlds Model (1998) to explore the influences of these Latino students' worlds of home, school, peers, community, and a university partnership program on their college preparation. In the study by Phelan et al. (1998), adolescent students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds often had to negotiate borders between incongruent worlds and did so with variable success. In the larger research project on which this study is based, students had less difficulty negotiating these borders as many of their worlds provided bridges to help diminish this incongruence. This article focuses specifically on the world of school and explores how schools can bridge these borders and prevent the damage done by "subtractive schooling" practices, as described by Valenzuela (1999). In Valenzuela's examination of an urban high school in Texas, schooling practices subtracted resources from Mexican American youths by devaluing their linguistic and cultural heritage and expecting students to "care" about school when school personnel did not demonstrate true caring toward them. Valenzuela refers to this dichotomy as "aesthetic" caring, which is embodied in teachers' demands for students to care about their schoolwork, as opposed to the Latino youth's definition of "authentic" caring, which encapsulates the genuine relationships and compassion that Latino students sought from their teachers. This study examines aesthetic versus authentic caring in a more supportive school environment and shows how it can impact students' motivation and preparation for college.

Findings are also compared with studies that documented other subtractive schooling practices such as the marginalization of English-language learners through academic tracking (Valdés, 1998) and disciplinary issues owing to overcrowding and inadequate school conditions (López, 2002). These studies found that Latino students were often the victims of destructive institutional practices that set low academic expectations and implemented disciplinary policies that treated students as potential criminals. Findings show that the high school examined in this study exemplifies qualities that contrast sharply with these negative portrayals.

Other studies have examined successful practices for Latinos and documented key elements that schools need to support the college preparation of these students. The Hispanic Dropout Project, sponsored by the federal government in 1999, developed a list of effective practices based on visits to schools across the country with

large Latino populations. These practices included setting high expectations, helping students envision a positive future, providing access to a rigorous curriculum, providing tutors and mentors for students, valuing students' linguistic and cultural heritage, and increasing parent involvement (Lockwood & Secada, 1999). In another major investigation by the National Postsecondary Education Cooperative, Gándara and Biel (2001) examined numerous published studies, surveys, and reports on intervention programs for underrepresented youth and reported similar findings about what practices were effective for Latinos, adding the importance of developing positive peer affiliations. Tierney, Colyar, and Corwin (2003) reviewed the literature on successful practices for Latinos and offered nine propositions that parallel earlier studies and suggest the importance of a rigorous academic curriculum, counseling, cocurricular activities, family and community engagement, peer group support, mentoring, extended time of interventions, and funding priorities. These propositions relate closely to many of the supportive schooling practices found in this study and reinforce the need to provide such effective interventions for all students.

Research Methods

This study explored how one exemplary high school contributes to the college preparation of Latino immigrant students. As part of a larger ethnographic study, I spent 5 months at a well-respected public high school following nine Latino high school students who were also participants in a college preparation program offered through a local university. These students and their parents were interviewed about their experiences in preparing for college, and students took part in two focus group sessions to discuss these issues further. Participants were recruited through contacts I had at the university-sponsored college preparation program and in the local K-12 school system. Because this study was designed to focus on successful practices, students were selected from a program and a high school with high graduation and college enrollment rates for Latino immigrant students. Although this does not guarantee that every participant in this study would be successful, it allowed me to look at the characteristics of these programs and experiences of the students in them that may contribute to successful college preparation.

Students were selected from a range of grade levels, genders, and national origins in order to gather various perspectives on the college preparation process throughout high school. Six female and three male students, enrolled in the 9th to 12th grades, were represented in the study. They were generally B students with a mean grade point average of 2.9 on a 4-point scale and a range of 2.4 to 3.9 for the entire group. Participants included first- and second-generation Latino immigrants, with some belonging to generation 1.5, who arrived as young children. Their families immigrated from Mexico, Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Guatemala, Bolivia, Chile, and Peru. The families all lived in a suburban area outside

of a major northeastern city and their children attended a public high school located in a neighborhood that had become notorious for its gang issues, violence, and poverty. Despite this reputation, the high school has achieved equal notoriety for being a model of successful integration and academic achievement and is often featured in the local media. At the time of this study, the school had an enrollment of 1380 students with 30% Hispanic, 27% White, 20% Asian, 12% Middle Eastern, and 11% Black. With 70% of these students being born outside of the United States and more than 25 different languages spoken, it is no surprise that the school was often referred to as a “United Nations” high school. The poverty rate at the school was also high, with 54% of students qualifying for free or reduced-price lunch under federal guidelines. However, the school had an impressive attendance and graduation rate, with 96% in average daily attendance and 90% graduating, well above the national average for this population. In 2002, 99% of graduates were expected to enroll in a 2-year or 4-year college or university.

Data were collected through multiple ethnographic techniques, including audio-taped student interviews, parent interviews, and focus group sessions; participant observation in the school; and review of school and program records and documents. These diverse data sources were used to triangulate research findings as suggested by Maxwell (2004). Various qualitative research tools and methods were used to analyze the collected data and formulate conclusions. All observation notes and interviews were transcribed and coded using NUD*IST qualitative software. Using the framework of Phelan et al.’s (1998) Multiple Worlds Model, the data were sorted by world and by the following areas of support needed for successful college preparation: academic, economic, sociocultural, and psychological. These data were then condensed into matrices, as suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994), and were reorganized by themes that developed through grounded theory and often related to interventions from studies by Lockwood and Secada (1999), Gándara and Biel (2001), and Tierney and others (2003). Themes that emerged from the data illustrate how this high school provides a supportive schooling environment for all students.

Findings

Jefferson High School (school and student names are all pseudonyms) has been recognized locally and nationally for educating a highly diverse student population and preparing these students for college. The school helped fulfill the needs of the Latino students in this study by setting high expectations, providing access to a rigorous academic curriculum and to the latest instructional technologies, embracing cultural and linguistic diversity, and demonstrating caring and support from many teachers and counselors.

High Expectations

As standards and exams mandated by state and federal governments have played an increasingly important role in schools, Jefferson High School has embraced these challenges as an opportunity to raise its expectations for all students. Although the goal of setting high expectations has been touted by educational leaders and politicians, it is often difficult to cite examples of how to achieve this goal without simply weeding out those students who fail to meet these expectations. Valenzuela (1999) illustrates how teachers and administrators from the White, middle-class majority may place blame on the students for not meeting their goals, rather than examining how they need to change their educational practices to facilitate students' achievement of these expectations. In contrast, under the leadership of a dynamic principal who believes that all students can succeed, the entire staff at Jefferson appeared to be working toward the goal of helping their students meet these high standards. This is carried out in part by setting clear and consistent attendance and disciplinary policies, and by establishing classroom learning environments that encourage students to ask questions, seek assistance, and complete college preparatory coursework regardless of their English proficiency or academic level.

All of the Latino students in this study showed respect for the strict attendance, punctuality, and disciplinary rules of the school. They expressed the fact that to do otherwise would invoke consequences, which would ultimately cause problems in achieving the future they desired. Helena explained, "We're the only ones that suffer if we're late . . . and if you're not there, they give you detention, so it looks bad on your . . . 'cause they do mark it down." Even when pressed, not one of these students admitted to skipping classes although I once caught one at the wrong lunch period toward the end of the year. Generally, they were very diligent about being in class and being on time, as verified by their attendance records. They even joked about how they would go to school when they were sick so they wouldn't miss anything, especially important tests.

Helena: It's really amazing how our situation is affected by missing 1 day of school. . . .

Sara: Yeah, it's crazy. I missed like 2 days before the spring break and I'm still making everything up, plus the work I'm doing now.

Interviewer: So you guys really try hard to be here so you don't have to deal with that? What about when you're sick?

Helena: You're coming to school! (All laugh)

Sara: I come, I come to school.

Sondra: You come to school with your tissues.

Good attendance, punctuality, and disciplinary records were evident for all nine students in this study, and from the appearance within the school and according to school records, they represent the norm rather than the exception. After the final bell for each class, I rarely saw a Jefferson student in the hallways, and during lunch period students were well supervised, staying within the cafeteria area at all times.

During the time of this study in 2003, the war in Iraq began, and on the 1st day of the war, a peaceful political protest broke out in the hallways at Jefferson with students carrying signs and shouting antiwar slogans. Administrators and staff members quickly disbursed throughout the building to keep things under control and in a matter of minutes students had all been directed to their classrooms without incident. Rather than punish students for speaking out, many teachers used the opportunity to discuss current events with the students, turning a potential disciplinary problem into a learning opportunity. In all of the time I spent as an observer, not once did I see any evidence of violence, threats, or foul language used in classes or in the hallways. In contrast to schools in which minority students are treated as potential troublemakers (López, 2002; Valenzuela, 1999), this school used fair and consistent policies to prevent problems and ensure a safe learning environment, sending a clear message that this school expected positive behavior from all students.

The classroom environment at Jefferson likewise demonstrated that high expectations were the norm, and students were given the necessary support to help them achieve these goals. Teachers encouraged students to ask questions and seek help when they needed it. Many teachers offered regular after-school hours to consult and tutor students who needed additional assistance, and the school operated busses at least 3 days a week so that students could stay after class for academic help or extracurricular activities. For example, Sondra explained, "I stay after a lot to get help from my teachers. . . . I think it makes them happy because it seems like you want to learn." Although this student is clearly referring to Valenzuela's (1999) "aesthetic" caring about school, she also mentioned particular teachers and counselors who had reciprocated by showing "authentic" caring toward her as well. The students in this study seemed especially open to asking for help and volunteering to participate in class. In 17 days of classroom observations, I documented at least 29 exchanges in which these students asked questions directly to their teachers. Likewise, on 24 separate occasions, one of the study participants volunteered answers in class or volunteered to be the spokesperson for a group activity. These characteristics may not be attributable entirely to the school atmosphere, however, as many of the students explained, they believed you had to be willing to ask for help in order to get it. The consistency in their responses led me to believe that this message may have been communicated to them in their college preparation program as well.

The school also used high expectations coupled with a complex safety net to help all students meet the requirements for a high school diploma. This particular school system provides two main academic options, which were labeled as a standard or advanced diploma. To receive either type of diploma, students were required to take college preparatory classes and pass state exams, with the advanced diploma requiring higher level courses in all four of the core content areas. All nine of the students in this study planned to complete an advanced diploma and clearly felt that anything less was inferior, although they were careful to make concessions for some of their peers who might not be capable of doing so.

Interviewer: Why would you want to [go for an advanced diploma]?

Sara: Cause it looks good.

Sondra: Oh, yeah, it sounds better.

Helena: (sarcastically) Oh, yeah, I got a standard diploma.

Sondra: I mean, if you can only do a standard, then, hey, you know. But it's not gonna hurt to try.

An advanced diploma with acceptable grades and test scores would give them all of the necessary coursework to apply and enter a major 4-year university, and all of them had been told at their college program meetings that they should strive for nothing less. At the time of this study, all of the students had passed every state test they had thus far taken except for one, and most of them admitted that the state tests tended to be far easier than their teachers' final exams.

Access to Academic Rigor and Technology

In light of the large number of students at Jefferson who spoke a language other than English at home or may have entered high school with below-grade-level skills, the school created a complex safety net to help all students achieve one of the two diplomas that include college preparatory coursework in all four core content areas. With state tests in each subject required for graduation, teachers explained how each department met and worked on their curriculum to ensure that all students, regardless of their linguistic and academic backgrounds when they arrived at the school, would be prepared to meet these requirements. To this extent the school had created many alternative course sequences, specialized courses, and courses to provide additional support for students needing help with their English, or with certain academic skills. There were English as a Second Language (ESL) classes that supported the regular English classes and sheltered academic classes for English-language learners who were not yet fully proficient. However, many other courses were offered regardless of students' English-language proficiency so that students who no longer qualified for ESL services also had options. Students were provided with developmental reading classes in addition to their regular English courses if tests administered in the 9th and 10th grade indicated that they were not on grade level in reading. Mathematics classes were sometimes spread over 2 years, such as Algebra, which was divided into 1A and 1B for students who struggled during the first semester, and Geometry, which also met over 2 years for students who had previous difficulties in mathematics. Algebra 2 was offered as a "double block" in which students attended class every day instead of on alternate days, as was usually the case in their block schedule. Science classes could be taken out of sequence if a student had not passed Algebra in the ninth grade. Sophomores often took a less advanced version of Physics and waited until their junior year for Chemistry, for which Algebra was a prerequisite. This concession also accommodated the state testing requirements in science.

These creative courses and sequences provide students increased opportunities to access a college preparatory curriculum regardless of their incoming academic and linguistic skills. Although not all of the students in this study needed or benefited from these safety nets, most of them had. In fact, all but two of these students had used one of these options to help them manage the hurdles of a college preparatory program. Because of the creative ways that these specially designed classes were scheduled, the students could still complete an advanced diploma and pass all of the necessary exams to graduate on time. Although some students felt that some of these classes had “messed them up” by altering the standard college preparatory sequence they hoped to complete, they were able to continue forward toward their goals without failing or repeating courses, which might have jeopardized their college prospects. Given the fact that less than a quarter of Latinos graduate with the coursework needed to enter a 4-year institution of higher education, providing access to the college preparatory curriculum boosts their chances of not only enrolling in college but also gives them a 50% chance of graduating with a college degree in the future (Oakes, Mendoza, & Silver, 2006; Swail et al., 2004).

Students at Jefferson were privileged to have access to high-quality facilities and technology at their school. Although their school was undergoing major renovations at the time of this study, the students readily admitted that the inconvenience was worth the result. The already completed wings had bright, well-furnished classrooms, modern fitness facilities, and updated restrooms. Even the older parts of the building were clean and well maintained during the transition. Unlike the state of many schools in which minority students are crammed into overcrowded and run-down school buildings (López, 2002), ongoing renovations at Jefferson sent a clear message that the school system cared about giving all students modern, updated facilities. All of the classrooms were equipped with overhead projectors, TVs, DVD players, and at least one Internet-accessible computer. Many teachers connected computers to television screens to use PowerPoint presentations and to share online resources with students. The science laboratories had modern equipment, and there were numerous classrooms with computer labs throughout the business, mathematics, and science departments. Jefferson students also had access to a well-stocked library with study areas and Internet-accessible computer labs that were available for their use before, during, and after school hours.

For some of the students in this study, access to these tools was essential given their lack of technological resources at home. The more recent immigrant students, such as Elias and Nina from Mexico, were keenly aware of the advantages of studying in such an environment. Their comments illustrate this awareness:

Elias: Como nosotros vivíamos en una parte muy diferente . . . entonces no era algo grande. Las escuelas solo tenían como seis salones del uno al seis, seis salones. No era grande y aquí es muy diferente. Seis salones no es nada y los cuartos también, muy diferentes. Aquí uno tiene mas cosas.

Entrevistadora: Supongo que no tenían muchas computadoras y todo eso.

Elias: No, creo que ni una.

[Elias: Since we lived in a very different area . . . then it wasn't something big. The schools only had like six classrooms from grades one to six, six classrooms. It wasn't big and here it is very different. Six classrooms isn't anything and the rooms were also very different. Here you have more things.

Interviewer: I imagine that they didn't have many computers and all that.

Elias: No, I think there wasn't even one.]

For other students, access to technology at school was also important. Bernardo mentioned that his Internet access at home had been cut off when his father left the country for a while and stopped paying the bill. Yessenia also complained that her older model computer at home was not connected to the Internet, making some assignments difficult to complete without use of school or library facilities. Providing an educational environment in which students have ready access to the tools and technology they needed to be successful was another way this school demonstrated authentic caring for its students.

Embracing Cultural and Linguistic Diversity

While focusing on preparing all students for the future in a high-tech society, Jefferson also embraced its students' past by valuing their cultural and linguistic backgrounds. The school has been featured in local and national newspaper and magazine articles as a model of multicultural relations among its highly diverse student population. Although Latinos comprise the largest group in the school, the student population also included many African Americans, Asians, and Middle Eastern students who spoke more than 25 different languages.

Students at Jefferson often took their diversity for granted and seemed to consider it normal when school shows and programs included other languages, music and dance from other cultures, and international costumes. For example, the school hosted a fashion show that opened with a Middle Eastern belly dancer and featured multicultural models strutting down the catwalk to the latest Latin pop music. A school rally included a mostly African American stomp team and a dance team of mixed ethnicity and gender. At a school film festival, student-produced videos included both serious and humorous clips in which students used different languages.

At our school, it's so diverse, you know, it makes no difference. (Helena)

There's not really a lot of White kids if you think about it. And . . . yeah, they have clubs, the Hispanic, and the Black, African American, whatever, but it's very diverse. We're mixed a lot, and it's cool to see people like that. (Sondra)

Classrooms were equally diverse, with students from all backgrounds in every academic level, although honors and International Baccalaureate classes tended to

have a few more White students than others. Overall, the students were comfortable in this setting and viewed their home cultures as a respected part of their identity. Likewise, students at Jefferson did not have to worry about wearing a hijab (Muslim head-covering) or being teased about their dress, accent, or appearance.

Similarly, student use of home languages was welcomed in the school and classrooms. Although instruction was conducted in English, except for classes in the foreign-language department, students could often be heard carrying on conversations with each other in their own languages and teachers seemed to accept this openly. The language department also offered Spanish for fluent speakers to accommodate the large number of Spanish heritage speakers in the school. Despite the fact that few teachers in the school shared their students' linguistic and cultural backgrounds, teachers were obviously proud to work in this environment and relished their students' diversity. I observed students speaking other languages during paired and group work in classes, as well as socially in the hallways and cafeteria. I even noticed two students surfing the Internet and visiting Web sites in Spanish and Arabic during one business class. The school also reached out to parents through use of interpreters, notices sent in multiple languages, and a Spanish parent organization.

Another important aspect of these students' social development came from their involvement in various activities and sports both at school and in the community. Most of the Latino students in this study were involved in at least one school-sponsored club, activity, or sports team. A few had also taken on positions of leadership in student government or as team captains. Jefferson seemed to foster student involvement across diverse cultural groups by allowing students to express their cultural identities freely in these activities, as was evidenced by the use of different ethnic costumes, music, dance, and languages at the school fashion show, pep rally, and film festival. Many of the students in this study felt that being involved in activities and sports actually helped them academically as well. Sara explained:

This year I did indoor track, I tried out for drill team and . . . I didn't think I was gonna make it, cause I remember I was gonna do basketball, so that was like my back-up plan, then I made it. And then I somehow I did indoor track too and still I kept my grades up. And I remember after that, I started doing the one-act [plays], so I would get home like around 8 o'clock, I would have to eat, shower, and then do my homework and it was so hectic. But it's funny because during that time that I had so much to do was when I got the best grades.

One other benefit of school activities for many students was the chance to develop new friendships with students who shared their interests and talents. As Tanya stated, "I love softball. I've gotten the chance to meet a lot of new people and, I think it's something fun to do, without always having the same friends you chill with all the time." Students formed friendships easily across ethnic and cultural groups and participated in extracurricular activities that often integrate and celebrated their differences, while allowing them to form common bonds and develop the positive peer affiliations suggested by Gándara and Biel (2001).

Supportive Teachers and Counselors

Students in this study also spoke of the bonds they had formed with certain teachers and counselors at the school. Although not every teacher or counselor was exemplary in this respect, most of the students in the study spoke of at least one staff member who had particularly inspired or encouraged them in their college pursuits. The Latino students in this study explained some of the ways that teachers, administrators, and counselors tried to motivate them for college attendance. They recounted their mixed experiences. Freshman students Sara, Sondra, and Yessenia all had classroom teachers who talked about the importance of getting good grades and who encouraged them to work hard for their college aspirations. As Yessenia explained about her English teacher, "He always pushed us a lot more, especially like, a lot of people would give up, but he wouldn't let anybody give up in his class . . . he would never let that happen." In another class I observed a teacher who invited a few Jefferson alumni to speak to the students about their recent experiences as freshmen in college and the process they went through to get there. Teachers also occasionally gave assignments that related to college, such as one computer project in which students had to choose five universities to research on the Internet, create a database of them, draft letters to request information, and prepare a PowerPoint presentation about their favorite one.

Students spoke about both aesthetic and authentic caring in relation to teachers throughout the study. They clearly believed that teachers who exhibited the type of authentic caring that Valenzuela (1999) extolled in her study were positive influences on their learning and motivation, and those who did not were either tolerated or resisted.

Sondra: Some teachers, you can tell if they want you to learn or if they want to help you and sometimes that can be your motivation. Knowing that your teacher gets happy when you do something good . . . cause some teachers, they just look in your face and if they know you don't get something, they're like, "No, you don't get it," they repeat it. They know, they can like read your face and that's something good, cause you know, oh, my teacher wants me to learn. My teacher wants to help me.

Tanya: Like the other day, even though P.E. is not a big deal, but I know for a fact that us four . . . it came to a point where we hated our P.E. teacher and the other day, she comes to us and tells us that we have the potential to be whatever we want to be.

Sara: I was about to cry. I mean, she made us feel so special.

Tanya: And it came out of nowhere, you know. But . . . since then, we've been getting along and there hasn't been problems with us, and we actually like . . . not look forward to going to P.E. but we know we won't cause any drama in P.E. So, I also believe that if the teacher shows that they care, then we'll care too.

These students were keenly aware of how teachers demonstrated authentic caring toward them and responded accordingly. Valenzuela (1999) found students were

willing to “care” about school in the aesthetic sense as long as teachers “cared” about them authentically. Although there were examples of both caring and uncaring teachers in this school, these students also recognized the necessity of tolerating those who did not reach out to them in order to achieve their ultimate goals of a college education.

Some students in this study had helpful counselors who worked with them to think about the steps they needed to take to achieve their professional goals, but others mentioned problems in trying to meet with their counselors, or being brushed off when requesting schedule changes or other help. Some students simply explained that they had not really made much of an effort to visit or seek their counselor’s advice.

Helena: I mean, your counselor’s there, you just have to go to see them.

Bernardo: Every time I went, my counselor wasn’t there.

Sondra: If it wasn’t for my counselor, I don’t think I’d be doing as well as I am because I know that she’s there, you know. She always has something good to say, she’s always leading me in the right direction. It’s like she didn’t give up on me and it’s been all year and still, she’s there.

Yessenia: Not my counselor. I went three times for her to switch me out of my class, and then every time I made an appointment, she was never there. She was never . . . and then finally, when I saw her and everything, she told me to come back the next day. I went back the next day, she wasn’t there.

Helena: I get lazy to go see my counselor.

Despite some of these issues, these students noticed that the counseling department at their school had had much turnover in the past few years and speculated that perhaps the problems they had experienced were beginning to be addressed by administrators who were shuffling personnel to improve student counseling services. Although students reported some mixed experiences with teachers and counselors, most of them had more positive relationships with school staff than negative ones, and all of them could give examples of teachers, counselors, or administrators demonstrating authentic caring through their words and actions.

Collaborating With College Partnership Programs

The entire staff at Jefferson worked toward creating a quality educational environment in which all students believed that they could and would succeed. However, despite this academic achievement, students in the study reported that many of their friends and classmates were not planning to enroll in a 4-year college or university simply because they lacked the information and assistance needed to negotiate the college application process. This is a similar finding to many other studies that document the lack of social and cultural capital of Latino immigrant families and students in the college preparation process (Auerbach, 2004; González, Stoner, & Jovel, 2003; Stanton-Salazar, 1997; Swail, 2000; Ward, 2006). Although Jefferson is

doing an excellent job of preparing Latino students for college, these study participants relied heavily on a university partnership program to provide the extra support needed to reach their ultimate goals.

Casi la mayoría los que están en el programa (van a ir a la universidad). Ellos son los que han decidido ir, pero los que no están, ellos no tienen ayuda por nadie. Entonces ellos no saben, no tienen información, no la buscan. Como están en la misma situación que yo, sus papas no saben inglés, sus papas no han ido a la universidad, no tienen familia en la universidad. Entonces por eso casi, tengo muchos amigos que no van a ir a la universidad, solo porque no tienen la información. (Nina)

[Almost all of the ones who are in the program (are going to college). They are the ones that have decided to go. But the ones that aren't in it, they don't have help from anyone. So they don't know, they don't have the information, and they don't look for it. Since they are in the same situation as I am . . . their parents don't speak English, their parents haven't gone to college, they don't have any family in college. So that's why, I really have many friends who aren't going to college, just because they don't have the information.]

Fortunately, school leaders at Jefferson were willing to acknowledge the need for additional support and opened their doors to various outside programs that helped to fill these gaps. Although schools can provide many supportive practices to create a quality educational program for Latino students, perhaps one of the most important findings from this study is the need to reach out to the community for resources that can complement school efforts in paving the road to college.

Discussion

Practices that have historically set up insurmountable roadblocks for Latinos, such as academic tracking and ethnic discrimination as described by Valdés (1998), López (2002), and others, were not only absent from the school in this study but were purposefully counteracted. Unlike the subtractive schooling documented by Valenzuela (1999), these Latino students were given opportunities and provided with supportive school practices that fostered academic success. Students clearly benefited from the steps taken at Jefferson to “level the playing field” and from teacher beliefs and expectations that their Latino students were capable of completing college preparatory work regardless of their linguistic, sociocultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds. It is important to note that this school did not simply provide equal opportunity to these students but used additional measures to create an equitable educational environment, as suggested by Banks and Banks (1995) in their discussion of equity pedagogy. This environment included creating an academic ladder to reach the high expectations set for all students, embracing the diversity of their students' linguistic and cultural heritage, and connecting students with adults in the school who demonstrated authentic caring toward them.

Many of the intervention strategies offered in the literature are apparent in the high school portrayed in this study. As suggested by the literature (Gándara & Biel, 2001; Lockwood & Secada, 1999; Tierney et al., 2003), the Latino students in this study benefited from three major academic strategies. The teachers and leaders in their school set high expectations for their educational achievement, provided access to a challenging academic program, and supported them with tutoring and special classes. Beginning with strict rules for attendance and behavior, the school set a tone in which all students were deemed capable of learning and reaching their goals. In contrast to studies of Latino dropouts (Davison Avilés, Guerrero, Howarth, & Thomas, 1999; Romo & Falbo, 1996), these students were not placed in remedial classes or excluded from college preparatory courses. If they struggled in an academic class, they were given a second chance through specially designed course sections that moderated the pace of the work or doubled up on their exposure to the subject rather than being marginalized in dead-end ESL sequences like the students in Valdés' (1998) research. These findings suggest that schools can raise Latino achievement by setting high standards and creating a safety net through creative scheduling and course blocking to bolster achievement. Teachers, counselors, and mentors can encourage students to take challenging courses and maintain a full load of academic courses throughout their 4 years in high school. Schools can offer additional academic support through tutoring, teacher availability after school, and specialized classes, like the reading skills course and extended mathematics sections. All of these efforts combined can provide the academic base for Latino students' successful completion of a college preparatory program.

The school environment can contribute heavily to Latinos' giving up on school, as seen in studies by Avilés et al. (1999), Valenzuela (1999), and others in which dropouts report feeling disenfranchised and discriminated against in their schools. Creating an environment in the school that celebrates students' cultures and languages and embraces diversity is crucial in supporting their sociocultural development. The students in this study were proud of the diversity within their school and formed friendships across cultural lines with ease.

Jefferson High School is a model multicultural environment in which students and faculty appear to be colorblind yet acknowledge and respect each student's cultural heritage. Most of the students were also highly involved in school and community activities such as sports teams, dance, drama, and school leadership. Schools need to ensure that extracurricular activities are appealing and accessible to Latino students, especially when financial need or lack of transportation may interfere with their ability to participate, as cited in a study by Avilés (1999) and others. Jefferson encouraged multicultural music and dance in artistic performances and provided after-school busses for students to stay for practices and rehearsals. All of these activities strengthened students' sociocultural development while providing positive interaction with peers who share their interests and ambitions.

Students also need to develop authentic relationships of caring with teachers or counselors at school who will motivate and encourage their college aspirations and pursuits (Valenzuela, 1999). Although students at Jefferson described both positive and negative experiences with teachers and counselors at the school, they had all formed some positive relationships with faculty members who exhibited genuine caring for them. Many found additional support through the college partnership program that the school had formed with a university-based organization. This willingness to go beyond the school walls and reach out to community resources is another lesson for schools that hope to fulfill the needs of their Latino students. By developing a holistic view that bridges students' worlds and values the family, community, and local organizations that can provide more support, schools can create an additive environment and truly achieve the goal of supportive schooling for Latinos on the pathway to college.

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Kristin Percy Calaff, PhD, is a research associate in the College of Education at the University of Washington, Seattle. Her research is focused on identifying and examining programs and practices that foster high academic achievement and college access for culturally and linguistically diverse students.



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