

TEACHER BIAS IN THE CLASSROOM

Utilizing Personal Experiences

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Through the lens of the researcher, this autoethnographic study gleaned insights into teachers' perceptions of their Mexican American students. In Texas, more than 50% of students enrolled in K–12 are Hispanic. While the population continues to grow, students continue to fall behind academically. Cultural misconceptions do impact student success. As teachers search for ways to improve learning, there is a need to reflect on how personal bias affects achievement. This research study utilized data from a Texas suburban school district and included five secondary teacher participants as they planned for and delivered lessons to their students which included mostly Mexican American high school freshmen. The data revealed deficit thinking was evident in the teachers' perceptions of their students and influenced academic expectations, lesson planning, and instruction.

INTRODUCTION

Growing up in a small Texas town I experienced racism, discrimination, and oppression as a poor, migrant, Latina, and English learner. Disciplined for speaking Spanish and realizing that everything about me was considered bad left a long lasting impression of how a White minority could overpower a Hispanic majority due to an oppressive system that gave privilege to a certain color, class, and religion. The experiences of my youth created the lens for how I saw the world around me as I struggled to overcome the tough lessons of what it meant to be American in the 1980s.

There were times when I heard people give credit to that one teacher who made a difference in their lives. I could not do so because I did not have a teacher who gave me worth. I had teachers who were okay, some who were indifferent, and some who went out of their way to create a miserable environment. I learned not because I had great teachers, I learned because I was petrified of the punishment for failing. Not understanding English and the reasons for punishment, I learned fear and compliance at an early age. In the end I did graduate high school but the treatment I received, the one I could not define, followed me as I thought about what I

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wanted to do after graduation without guidance and support.

The events that occurred in my life paved the way for my interest in righting the wrongs I experienced in school. Becoming a teacher allowed me to help children who looked like me. However, my struggle persisted as I continued to see teachers discriminate against students in the school where I taught. I saw a similar system that could not protect the children from people who claimed to want to help, yet their actions were in complete contradiction. Working to show bilingual students could be successful allowed me to participate on district committees giving me access to a movement organizing to build Latinx leaders. It was through these connections that I was recruited to the masters program and to campus leadership where I believed I could make a bigger difference.

When I became the school leader my plans were to challenge the social inequities and injustices I had experienced. However, the same oppressive system showed its familiar face creating obstacles not allowing me to wrong the rights I wanted to address. My struggle continued as I worked to change the deficit mindsets of some teachers. As I searched for ways to expose personal teacher biases leading to students' lack of academic achievement, I realized that I was fighting a conviction as old as time. I recognized that just like my experiences and upbringing had created the lens for how I experienced the world, the people teaching in my school were using their own lenses to decide which students could and should learn. It was this recognition that led me to this research study wanting to know not just if teachers' perceptions impacted academic achievement for the largest growing demographic in Texas, but also seeking that longing question of why some teachers felt so disconnected from their students and how that disconnection created an obstacle for learning.

For this autoethnographic study I utilized my experiences as a student and my work as an elementary bilingual teacher working in a pre-

dominantly Hispanic school with a high percentage of poor students and a mostly White teaching force to explore biases in high school classrooms that impacted Mexican American children. I also employed my elementary school principal experiences to gauge the appropriateness, within my purview, of the culturally relevant pedagogy. Utilizing my own perceptions, based on my own circumstances, I explored my study through these three lenses.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The Texas Tribune (2014) reported that the 2010–2011 school year was the first time over 50% of students enrolled in K–12 were Hispanic. The population continues to grow yet Mexican American students continue to fall behind their Anglo counterparts in academics. The Educational Latino Pipeline flowchart shows that out of every 100 Latinos who entered school only 46 would graduate from high school, 26 would enroll in a university but only 8 would graduate with a college degree (Hurtado, Cervantez, & Eccleston 2010; Yosso & Solórzano, 2006).

Because the majority of teachers in Texas are currently White, and at the time of the study (Academic Excellence Indicator System [AEIS], 2011; Texas Education Agency, 2017), it is possible that culture impacts the academic achievement of students of color. The politics of caring, according to Valenzuela (1999) include the miscommunication between students and teachers due to a misunderstanding on how each defined caring. How teachers and students are oriented to each other is central to the framework of caring (Noddings, 1984). When a cultural disconnect occurs the miscommunication that transpires forces both teachers and students into thinking that the other is in opposition and therefore creates tensions that result in the building of a defensive system to combat the aggression (White, Zion, Kozleski, & Fulton, 2005). The unintended outcome may promote the idea that

teachers hate Mexican Americans and Mexican Americans hate teachers, disrespect authority, and are apathetic toward school (Almager, 2012). These students are not usually antischool or oppositional; they just oppose the schooling process they perceive as disrespectful toward their identity (Valenzuela, 1999).

Because many White teachers experienced school differently, their personal understanding of oppression based on race, ethnicity, class, and language is limited due to their place in the dominant society of their communities (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). This idea may drive the common practices teachers use when planning for and executing lessons as well as their overall expectations for their Mexican American students (Almager, 2012). The belief system may contribute to the deficit thinking of some teachers and explain school failure among low socioeconomic students and groups of color (Menchaca, 1997; Valencia, 2010; Valencia & Black, 2002). Regardless of whether or not classroom and/or school resources are adequate, common practices in current school cultures may continue to drive how some teachers approach their professional responsibilities in the classroom including student academic performance (Almager, 2012). When providing instruction to different students, teachers have biases that lead them to blame students for any behaviors that devalue educational success (Valencia, 1997; Valenzuela, 1999). As teachers work to improve academic achievement they should reflect upon their own cultural biases and how these biases create obstacles for student learning through preconceived ideas leading to deficit thinking. This crucial self-reflection can lead toward the necessary change in how teachers design lessons and instruct their students.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Because deficit thinking permeates educational systems, the school's objective is to educate passive students with forms of cultural

knowledge deemed valuable to the dominant society (Yosso, 2005). Bourdieu's (1977) theory of cultural capital continues to contend that some communities are culturally wealthy while others are culturally poor, therefore, wealth that is valuable to an economically disadvantaged student is not considered to carry any capital in the school context. The lack of social capital, or wealth, plays a role in schools where poor students of color are the majority. Social capital is the sum of the actual and potential resources that can be mobilized through membership in social networks (Anheier, Gerhards, & Romo, 1995). "Students who begin the year with only small reserves of skills will not succeed; and those who come with more positive orientations or greater skills are better equipped to offset the more debilitating aspects of schooling" (Valenzuela, 1999, p. 6). Therefore, students not born into a family whose knowledge is considered valuable but can access middle or upper class knowledge have the potential for social mobility through formal schooling (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). This argument poses the idea that students of color lack the social and cultural capital for social mobility (Yosso, 2005).

According to Noddings (1984), schools are structured around an aesthetic concern concentrating on giving important attention to things and ideas. A discourse between teachers and students is important, but the manner in which the discourse occurs is also essential to communication. Because we live in a society that nurtures stereotypes, teachers make assumptions judging students' "actions, words, intellect, families, and communities" (Delpit, 2006, p. xxiv). In predominantly minority districts, middle class teachers are sometimes unable to identify with the poor students of color they teach because they also tend to hold these stereotypes (Delpit, 2006). Delpit goes on to add that as citizens of the dominant society battle each other over what is good for other people's children, they exclude from the conversations those who have the most to lose or gain by the outcomes. Teachers' beliefs about their stu-

dents shape their instructional behaviors and these behaviors are formed early in a teacher's career starting even before preservice education and are difficult to change (Mercado, 1993).

It is important to recognize that the necessary skills for culturally responsive teachers begin with preparation programs. To address the inequities in schools requires "a cadre of teachers who understand the political nature of schools and who are adept at identifying inequalities in their own schools and classrooms, skilled in reconstructing the school and classroom culture in order to make it inclusive of all children, (Liston & Zeichner, 1991, p. xviii). When teachers are able to utilize culturally relevant pedagogy, they know how to maintain high expectations for student learning while creating a safe environment. "Culturally relevant pedagogies draw and build on students' linguistic and experiential funds of knowledge in order to make learning meaningful, relevant, and accessible" (Dudley-Marley, 2015, p. 49). Using this methodology allows students from diverse backgrounds opportunities for learning they otherwise might not obtain but most importantly, it requires informed educators at all levels of schooling.

METHODOLOGY

A major purpose of this autoethnographic study was to glean insights into some of the ways in which teachers' perceptions and practices help or hinder the academic success of Mexican American students. A researcher's personal interpretation based on justified beliefs creates the methods for shaping how he or she will see the world, act in it, and understand the framework that will guide a study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). Looking at problems involves a paradox because it involves the view of both the insider and the outsider. "This means embarking on a journey that is simultaneously systematic and unpredictable, messy and structured, enlightening and con-

fusing, and infuriating and accepting," (Almager, 2012, p. 64). This practical messiness allowed me to experience the study through my own personal lens.

This research study focused on how the cultural perspectives of five secondary classroom teachers impacted instructional decisions for Mexican American students in their classrooms. Using an autoethnographic approach, this study was constructed using interactive and informal interviews including my own perspectives based on Glesne's (1999) explanation that this type of writing "inquiries into the self as part of a sociocultural context" (p. 181). Using this method, I was able to use Ellis's (2004) theory by weaving my own experiences and making connections to the participants' stories in the data analysis. The data drew responses from my own personal experiences, perceptions, cultural interpretations as a Mexican American student, teacher, and principal about what teachers do and say related to the Mexican American students they teach (Almager, 2012).

Research Questions

This research inquiry focused on answering: (1) In what ways did five secondary level teachers' perceptions influence how and what they taught?; and (2) Did any of the five secondary level teachers exhibit deficit thinking toward their Mexican American students?

Participants

Lincoln and Guba (1985) stated that a purposeful selection of a sample instead of a theoretical or statistical selection is the highlight of a qualitative study. Therefore, in a purposeful sampling, five secondary school teachers who were teaching Mexican American students were selected by one of the school's assistant principals. Inclusion criteria included secondary school teachers who taught ninth-grade Mexican American students.

TABLE 1
Teacher Demographics

<i>Teacher Pseudonyms</i>	<i>Ethnicity</i>	<i>Years of Experience</i>	<i>Years at West HS</i>	<i>Subject Taught</i>	<i>Alternative Education Certification</i>
Lucy García	Anglo	43	6	ELA/ESL	No
Leslie Henderson	Anglo	9	2	Pre-AP Geography	No
Tom Peterson	Anglo	3	3	Information technology	Yes
Peter Thomason	Anglo	6	2	Math models	Yes
Linda Adamson	Anglo	3	3	Biology/chemistry	Yes

Note: ELA = English language arts; ESL = English as a second language; AP = Advanced Placement.

After the initial interview, a classroom observation was scheduled with a follow-up debriefing. After the second debriefing, another classroom observation was scheduled also followed by a debriefing. Each teacher received a pseudonym to allow for anonymity. The school's name was also changed to protect the participants. Teacher demographics are explained in Table 1.

Data Sources/Instruments

Each participant was interviewed three times in a note taking and recorded format in order to develop a thorough understanding of perceptions concerning their Mexican American students. Each of the two classroom observations were conducted and were documented by taking notes in a field notes journal. Other data consisted of student grades, student attendance, AEIS Texas results for the entire school for 2011 including special populations. The teachers provided assistance in gathering student grades, attendance and information on any students participating in special programs like English as a Second Language and Special Education. Using the Texas Education Agency website, the 2011 AEIS report was downloaded to report student data. I also volunteered at the school for an entire fall semester to glean insights regarding the school's atmosphere.

Theoretical Framework

The theory of educational deficit thinking posits that the responsibility for academic failure lies on students and their families and not the educational system (Valencia, 1997; Valenzuela, 1999, 2009). It is important that schools and teachers assess the biases of their educational systems and how they may be depositing the negative influences which support student failure (Almager, 2012). To alter the inequities deeply ingrained in schools a cultural reconstruction inclusive of all children is necessary (Liston & Zeichner, 1991).

Although educators have a professional responsibility to provide equal access to all students regardless of color or race, cultural biases interfere with the obligation to provide an environment conducive to learning for specific demographics. Because deficit thinking fits current educational policy and practice, the manifestation of a democratic education sometimes seems unreachable (Valencia, 2010). A democratic education has two objectives: to develop an understanding of democracy through the experience of democracy, and the development of skills of informed and responsible citizenship by exercising citizenship. (Valencia, 2010).

Most teachers enter the profession to positively impact the lives of children, however, personal biases, if not addressed, can become obstacles to academic achievement. This autoethnographic study gleaned insights into

teachers' perceptions of their Mexican American students and the impact on decision making for lesson planning and instruction. Personal biases inform perceptions which may lead to intuitive decision making where lack of student success feeds already preconceived ideas of why students fail facilitating an environment for deficit thinking.

TRIFOCAL LENS DATA ANALYSIS

As I struggled on how to best present my findings it became apparent that my trifocal lens had experienced the study through multiple views. Due to my background I experienced the school through the perspective of three different individuals: a Mexican American student, a bilingual teacher, and an elementary principal. Close attention was devoted to both the interviews and the classroom observations as I encountered the behaviors and actions in the school personnel concerning what I heard and observed during the data collection process. This experience included how the participants might see me as one of their students, their colleague, and finally, as their principal. For this study, the data was presented in a narrative form using prose to convey the experience of the student.

Although I had a difficult time separating my lenses, the student's narrative experience became the strongest lens. I chose to write a story focusing on the perspective of the student and how she experienced the school on her first day. Although I viewed each lesson observation through my trifocal lens, the student's perspective became the priority. As a former principal, my experience in observing and rating lessons would emerge first. After assessing the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of an observed lesson, I reflected on how I, as a teacher might do things differently. Most times the assessment and reflection of the lessons occurred simultaneously. Finally, I could not help thinking of myself as a poor, English learner, migrant, Latina student in the classrooms and wondering how I could function in such a futile environment.

During the interviews my leadership space would emerge first as I asked questions and delved into the teachers' thinking concerning the decision making for planning and delivering lessons. As much as I tried to suppress my leadership lens, it was difficult to ignore what I saw happening and keep my biases in check. My passion for the teaching and learning of poor, Mexican American students was strong and I had to fight back what I really wanted to say to the teachers during the interviews. Therefore, I wrote what I was feeling in my journal and used the entries to create the narrative of the student. The format described my internal feelings, interweaved with collected data, as I experienced the study.

The Student

The student's narrative utilized data from classroom observations and teacher interviews. I created a narrative based on a Mexican American student's first day at the school of my study. The narrative was written utilizing school and classroom observations. Then, I created a high school Mexican American, freshman female character to experience the school using my own background thinking about how I may have perceived the school. The student attended each teacher participant's classroom on her first day of school. The following are two excerpts from the student's narrative piece I wrote to present the data:

Walking Into the Building

"Excuse me," I hear a voice say. I keep walking because I'm new and no one would be talking to me. "I said excuse me," but I keep walking. "Hey you," and I finally turn around. A White lady with big blonde and gray hair looks at me with a face that means I'm in trouble. "Didn't you hear me?" she says as she walks toward me. *Oh Lord what do I say? What do I tell her?* I stop and wait and I look at her and then I look down because I know what is about to happen. She is probably a teacher and I have done something wrong. I don't quite know what I've done but I know it's wrong because her face, and her green tun-

neled eyes, and her hands, and her waving arms, they tell me. They tell me I'm in trouble. (Almager, 2012, p. 86; Almager, 2017, p. 2)

Pre-AP Geography

My Pre-AP geography class is next to my math model's class in room 504. I walk in and immediately notice that everyone is White. The teacher is White and the majority of the students are White. This teacher is young, blonde and pretty.... The room is not messy or stuffy. I walk up to her desk and hand her my form. "Hi," she says with a smile. I respond accordingly and feel nervous that many White eyes are staring at me. God, I don't belong here!

The class gets ready for the bell and I walk back to my desk when the teacher touches my shoulder, and I cringe and move away quickly. I don't look back, because I don't want to see the reaction on her face. I don't like to be touched, please don't touch me I want to say, but I don't. I sit, and I look down.

Long ago when I was little I longed for a teacher's touch. The teachers would only touch the White kids but not us. I so wanted that touch on the head, the shoulder, or even the back. Once in the third grade a teacher almost touched me but she stopped herself and I saw her and she saw me and she knew. It was as if we were too dirty. No matter how many times I bathed or cleaned myself, I was still a dirty Mexican they couldn't touch. By the time I got to middle school I didn't long for that touch anymore. I began to despise it. I worked so hard not to want it and now I don't want to be touched. *God, I hate being poor, I hate the way I look and I hate being Mexican.*

The bell rings and I walk out heading for my last class of the day. I have to go all the way across the building to room 612. I still feel a bit uneasy about my reaction to Mrs. Henderson's touch but I don't care. She'll learn not to touch me. I know she will. (Almager, 2012, pp. 99, 107; Almager, 2017, p. 18)

FINDINGS

The focus of this autoethnographic research study was to answer (1) In what ways did five secondary level teachers' stated perceptions

influence how and what they taught?; and (2) Did any of the five secondary level teachers exhibit deficit thinking toward their Mexican American students? Hence, I used my experiences as a Mexican American student, teacher, and principal to reflect on my biases toward the educational system as I looked for ways to both blame and excuse teacher behaviors for the lack of Mexican American academic success. I had a deep desire to give complete culpability for student failures to the teachers. However, I had to also give responsibility to the system that supported the behavior and thinking that students are solely responsible for failing. As the researcher, I observed, asked questions, and wrote in my note pad. I knew I could not provide assistance to any of the participants as they wondered why many of their students were failing. This bothered me greatly because I was only there to conduct a study and not to intervene. It made me feel helpless as the cycle of ineffective instruction and student failure continued throughout my time at high school of my study.

Research Question 1 asks in what ways did five secondary level teachers' stated perceptions influence how and what they taught? Unfortunately the results revealed that negative perceptions did affect instructional decisions. In order to plan for and deliver lessons, teachers used their perceptions of students which were nourished by their biases. Past experiences and accepted traditions informed their perceptions. Although the teachers seemed to want to express sympathy for their students' lives and low performance, they still felt the students were solely responsible for their academic failures.

Research Question 2 asks did any of the five secondary level teachers exhibit deficit thinking toward their Mexican American students? Each teacher expressed in his or her own words and in his or her own way that regular track students did not perform due to their lack of home support and self-motivation. Although the teachers wanted their students to succeed, all five participants exhibited deficit thinking at different levels by expressing that

their students could not perform well and therefore working to ensure academic success was pointless. The sympathy in some cases led to low expectations due to students' backgrounds and the apathy provided the blame for academic failure as defined by deficit thinking.

All five teachers had a difficult time individualizing their Mexican American students from other students in their classrooms. Low performing students, those with behavioral issues, and those who came from poverty were all clumped together. Additionally, the secondary teachers had a difficult time discussing individual students' progress or needs. They talked about students from a certain period instead of providing a student's name. For example, seventh period would be compared to second period in academics and behavior. Additionally, they also could not tell me which students were in special programs like ESL (English as a second language) or special education without looking up the information on the computer. Three out of the five participants had little to no knowledge on how to access student data from the district's data system.

During the observations there were limited instructional modifications like less work and/or testing accommodations for English as a second language or special education students. All of the students received the same instruction and were offered the same assistance during in-class skills practice. When asked about lesson planning for students, teachers had a difficult time expressing and justifying their decisions. At the secondary level the calendar drove the curriculum. According to the teachers, sometimes they got behind the scope and sequence but for the most part, they stayed on schedule regardless of student mastery. There was no differentiation during lesson planning or lesson delivery. The five teachers provided tutorials before school, during lunch, or after school. The decision to attend was completely left up to the students. There were no motivational strategies in place to entice students to attend tutorials.

The absence of instructional or behavioral modifications for students indicated a possible

lack of knowledge about how modifications are implemented. However grim this observation was regarding instructional assistance, the suggestion implied that students in general did not receive needed assistance. This observation was not limited to Mexican Americans: it included all students in the regular track. However, the majority of students in regular track were Mexican Americans. The school was set up for block scheduling where the students met 90 minutes per class. Classes met every other day. Four of the five teachers taught for about an hour and then gave the students the rest of the time for practicing skills. The majority of the students I observed did not take advantage of this time. Even with teacher guidance most students did not do the assignments.

Through my questioning the deficit thinking ideology of my participants was revealed. Although I think that at times they held back their most honest feelings, perhaps because I was Mexican American, they did share some personal ideas of how they saw their students. All five participants seemed to have adequate knowledge of their content area. Their lessons were traditional for high school. They stood at the overhead, taught, provided guided practice, and assigned independent work. Their pedagogical skills were not extraordinary but were satisfactory. However, the student-teacher relationship was desperately missing in three of the five participants with little observable evidence of rapport between teacher and students.

The study revealed teachers did have deficit thinking and their biases did create obstacles for how they planned for and delivered instruction to their students. The message was that they felt overwhelmed with student outcomes which I, using my own bias, read as incompetence. Their lack of planning created student failure either because they did not know they were supposed to align instruction to student data or because they did not care to do so. Either way, the regular track Mexican American freshmen did not perform well academically. In the end, teachers have professional responsibility for the academic success of all

students. Why students failed should have been a self-reflective question and not one directed at students.

DISCUSSION

In a social justice way of thinking, an educator's primary role must include closing the achievement gap, but it is not enough to simply understand the problem. Left untreated, those unequal outcomes translate into unequal life opportunities for students, especially when the students are also students of color and from low-SES households. (Marshall & Oliva, 2010, p. 296)

Experiencing schooling 30 years later yet in a similar environment, confirmed unresolved systemic educational inequities. Adams, Bell, and Griffin (2007) describe social justice in education as a process and a goal where full and equal participation of all student groups is mutually constructed to meet their needs including a vision of society where the distribution of resources is also equitable to all members. The false belief that low academic achievement is caused by membership in a particular ethnic group or by poverty, calls for a social justice need to prevent the justification of blaming low-income and minority students

for their educational challenges (Marshall & Oliva, 2006). Further empirical research is needed on how much teachers' cultural biases affect classroom instruction for Mexican American students. The results of my study were typical and almost predictable but the question of why students fail continues to astonish educators. I recommend further research includes the assessment of proficiencies for critical pedagogy by examining whether successful teachers have keen knowledge alignment of the following three areas: knowledge of content area/s, knowledge of critical/effective pedagogy, and knowledge of student cultural diversity (Almager, 2012). The Teacher Knowledge Alignment Model can be seen in Figure 1.

In my study, Mexican American students needed their teachers to be adept at the use of culturally relevant pedagogy. This required teachers' knowledge of the school's community as well as the diverse population that it educated, including knowledge of the community that bused students to the school (Almager, 2012). Valencia (2010) recognized that Mexican American students do not necessarily need Mexican American teachers but they do need teachers who understand them. Because culture affects pedagogy and peda-

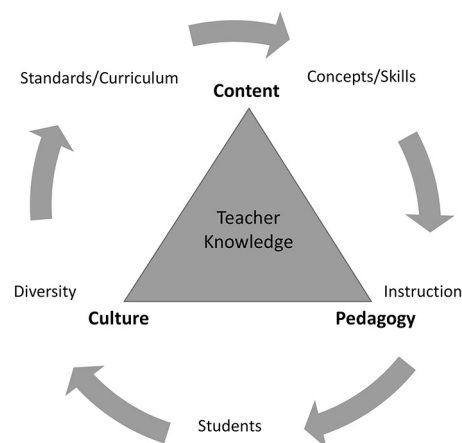


FIGURE 1
Teacher Knowledge Alignment Model (Almager, 2012, 2015, 2017)

gogy affects content, these three components must be present in order for Mexican Americans and other students of color to receive instruction that is geared not just to their academic needs, but also to their cultural needs (Almager, 2012).

IMPLICATIONS

There are serious implications if we do not improve the academic success of Mexican American students. Because Hispanic students make up more than 50% of the entire K–12 school population in Texas, large dropout rates not only affect schools financially, they affect our entire citizenry. The school where the study was performed paralleled state accountability issues where Hispanic, African American, and students of poverty performed lower on state tests in math and science compared to their White counterparts. Additionally, the state dropout numbers for the same demographics were higher citing 6,807 African American, 19,866 Hispanic, and 19,232 economically disadvantaged students did not graduate in Texas (Intercultural Development and Research Association, 2011). At the campus of the study, the Academic Excellence Indicator System (Texas Education Agency, 2011) cited that 13 African American, 28 Hispanic, and 32 economically disadvantaged students failed to graduate. Due to lack of access to individual student performance it is possible that students labeled economically disadvantaged may have also been labeled either African American or Hispanic. Although the focus of this study was Mexican American students, it was clear that African American students and those labeled economically disadvantaged also did not perform well.

Furthermore, the frustration of the participants who were alternatively certified mirrored the issue facing teachers who leave the profession early due to lack of support and success. In 2012, over 10% of Texas teachers left the profession (Texas Education Agency, 2012). Attrition rates continue to be an issue for many

schools with similar demographics as those of the school in the study. When teachers work as hard as they can and do everything they know how, lack of success leaves them feeling unaccomplished and therefore search for career alternatives. The rotating door of new educators does little to improve student learning outcomes and augments the already exhausted system that cannot diagnose why it fails certain groups of students.

CONCLUSION

If schools are a true reflection of our community we need to work on improving schools in high poverty areas so schools can contribute to community improvements (Almager, 2012). However, change is not easy. According to Reeves (2009), there must be an understanding that for change to occur, a change of culture must also occur. He goes on to say that involving teachers in the process is important because they have the highest impact on student learning. Additionally, there is a need for praxis because beliefs become behaviors in the classroom and how we reflect on our beliefs will help to critically examine our own behaviors (Wink, 2000). Yet, how our behaviors impact society as a whole is also important. Praxis is the constant reciprocity of our theory and our practice because theory building and critical reflection inform our practice and our action, and our practice and action inform our theory building and critical reflection (Wink, 2000). This is not just our action in the classroom as it affects students' academic achievement, but our actions which also impact our community. Sometimes teachers think they only influence what happens in the classroom. Teachers affect the entire student.

My desire to study teacher bias in the classroom did answer some questions but it also left many hanging. I observed teachers' actions but I could not place the reasons clearly as racist. Bias did lead to deficit thinking but it was so implicit that without true self-reflection or the ability to see oneself in an environment com-

portable with blaming students for academic failure, it went unnoticed. "It is true that to have knowledge is to have power, but a teacher's knowledge moves beyond power and into a realm where knowledge becomes a resource for either indignation or resignation," (Almager, 2012, p. 64). As teachers assess their student performance, they should consider any actions on their part first before blaming students for academic failure. My participants looked outward at the students first and only one out of the five mentioned that she should consider her teaching strategies. Teachers should carefully analyze their beliefs about cultural ethnicity and intellectual ability so they can determine if their student expectations are manifested in own their instructional behaviors (Delpit, 2006; Gay, 2010). Additionally, Gay (2000) stated that when teachers do not know their own cultural biases they are unable to look for ways to change them. Culturally responsive teaching is not just about adding content reflecting students' ethnic differences, it is also about "the behavioral expressions of knowledge, beliefs, and values that recognize the importance of racial and cultural diversity in learning" (Gay, 2000, p. 31). Students need an effective teacher who has adequate knowledge of his/her content area/s, who understands and can implement effective and critical pedagogy, and who can address the cultural diverse needs of the his/her students (Almager, 2012).

Teachers must assume the responsibility for making cultural connections and when they cannot, campus leadership should intervene. In addition to content and pedagogical knowledge, success in classrooms begins with cultural awareness and when individuals do not have the necessary skills leaders must intercede. The teacher's background and experiences will determine how he/she plans for, delivers, and assesses lessons; and the cultural background of the student will also determine how he/she will experience those lessons (Almager, 2012). When the teachers' and students' cultures are different, the disconnect that occurs often causes miscommunication

and false assumptions (Almager, 2012). Therefore, a cycle is set in motion that provides false assumptions for both teachers and students.

In order for this cycle to end teachers must take action for reconnecting the cultural miscommunication which includes building trust. In addition, teachers need to truly know their students academically so they can prepare appropriate lessons with rigor and relevance. With high accountability in its current form, teachers miss the opportunity to address the cultural disconnect, if they even know it exists, and each continues with the stereotype forcing the cycle to resume (Almager, 2012). Cycles of cultural miscommunication lead to apathy. Intentional or not, indifference was present in both students and teachers in my study. Perhaps without knowing both groups contributed to "unintentional apathy" which led to low expectations on both sides and therefore the cycle continued.

Understanding how our students see us as their teachers is as important now as it was when I was in school. Remembering how I was made to feel has allowed me to acknowledge students' backgrounds and perceptions, so that I can create culturally relevant pedagogy and provide an environment that is conducive for learning and inclusive for all. Dismantling apathy, in my opinion, is the responsibility of the educator. In addition, creating an environment where teachers feel safe and supported while learning to recognize their own biases will provide much needed cultural clarity extinguishing educator created obstacles for student learning.

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