Is the No Child Left Behind Act Adversely Impacting the Academic Performance of Latino Students in the U.S.? Yes, Indeed!

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Abstract
This paper first examines the impact of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 on the academic performance of Latino students in the U.S. Although the purpose behind NCLB is to help improve academic proficiency in the areas of reading, language arts, and mathematics, research demonstrates that there is still an achievement gap between minority and non-minority students. Second, the paper describes how NCLB impedes the academic success of Latino students by narrowing the curriculum. Third, in describing her longitudinal study with Latino students enrolled in an alternative education program, the author explains how designing a multicultural/anti-racist curriculum helped the students overcome the negative effects of oppositional culture.

Introduction

The United States was founded on the principles of democracy and for over two hundred years, the majority of its citizens have benefited from living in a democratic society. However, there exists a growing number of Americans who are not enjoying the fruits of a democracy, but instead are becoming increasingly disillusioned with the status quo. In general, it is the poor minority groups, namely, African Americans, American Indians, and Latinos that feel disenfranchised. Although there has been some progress made in the advancement of minority groups as can be seen in Senator Barack Obama's bid for the presidency, minority groups, in general, are still encountering difficulties in their quest for attaining and maintaining a better way of life. Research reveals that many minorities still live in poverty, live in segregated communities, and drop out of school at a higher rate than Whites (College Scholarship 2006; Orfield 2001; National Education Association 2003).

In its most recent attempt to improve the quality of education in the United States, the Federal Government passed the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (Public Law 107-110) or NCLB. This federal legislation seeks to improve the performance of primary and secondary schools in the U.S. by: a) increasing the standards of accountability for schools, school districts, and states; b) affording parents the opportunities to select which schools they wish their children to attend; and c) requiring states to develop assessments in basic skills to be administered to all students in particular grades (NCLB 2001). Proponents of NCLB argue that it has helped to narrow the achievement gap between minority and non-minority students because it has focused attention on the academic achievement of traditionally under-represented groups of children, namely, African Americans and Latinos, and by so doing has encouraged school districts to devise and implement appropriate interventions. Second, its supporters believe that systematic testing improves the quality of education because it places a spotlight on the schools that are not teaching basic skills effectively. They believe that once low performing schools are identified, measures can be taken to transform them into high performing schools. Third, supporters of NCLB contend that the improvements made in administration, curriculum development, instruction, and business practices are the result of a reliance on assessment data to formulate all decisions (NCLB 2001).

Although NCLB has garnered support from some politicians, the No Child Left Behind Act has generated criticism in the sociopolitical and pedagogical arenas. The major criticism associated with this legislation is that it may cause states to lower achievement goals or

manipulate test results in order to ensure that more students pass the exams. A second criticism of NCLB is that it encourages teachers to teach to the test. With the pressure of having students pass a standardized test, teachers may be inclined to teach only the content that will be assessed on the test. Another criticism surrounding NCLB is that it narrows the curriculum being taught in schools (Whelan 2006). Currently, NCLB focuses only on mathematics, reading, or language arts. As a result, school districts are paying less attention to the arts, social studies, and physical education (Wills 2007). Detractors of NCLB argue that students lose the benefits of a broad education when they are not allowed to develop skills in subjects other than mathematics, reading, and the language arts (Cawelti 2006).

In spite of the changes that school districts have implemented in response to NCLB, the overall status of disadvantaged students has not improved in the United States. In Thermal, California, for example, "19 of the 21 schools of the Coachella Valley Unified School District have not met the federal law's performance benchmarks for four years. In the U.S., 411 school districts in 27 states face intervention" (Williams 2008, 3A). Moreover, urban school districts serving large numbers of minority populations, for example, are experiencing high drop out rates and are more likely to have alternative schools and programs for at-risk students who regularly misbehave (National Center for Education Statistics 2002).[1]

Rationale

This paper will describe how: a) the No Child Left Behind Act is failing to significantly impact the academic performance of Latino students; b) NCLB is adversely affecting the academic performance of Latino students through its neglect of the arts; and c) how the author designed and presented a multicultural/anti-racist curriculum via the arts to Latino middle and high school students enrolled in alternative education programs. However, before these objectives can be addressed, a discussion of alternative education, and the academic performance of Latinos in primary and secondary schools is warranted.

Alternative Education

In the United States, the term "alternative education" is defined as nontraditional educational services for students, ranging from separate schools to special classes held in a regular school building (Hartzler and Jones 2002). Although alternative education can apply to any type of program that differs from traditional schooling, such as, vocational training and Montessori schools, it is increasingly being used to refer to programs designed for youth who are at risk of education failure due to truancy, disruptive behavior, suspension, pregnancy or other factors associated with early withdrawal from school (Raywid 2001). An unfortunate fact surrounding alternative education in the United States is that in spite of the growing numbers of students enrolled in alternative education programs, only a small number of national-level studies on the availability of public alternative schools and programs, staffing, enrollment, and services for students at risk of education failure exist (Oberhausen 2006; Holsey 2003). The first national study of public alternative schools and programs for students at risk of education failure in the United States was the 2001 "District Survey of Alternative Schools and Programs," conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) through its Fast Response Survey System (FRSS). School districts were asked to complete a survey that solicited

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[1] At-risk is a term often used to identify students who may be in danger of dropping out of school. A growing number of scholars, however, view the term as a negative characterization of students because it labels them, and thus serves as a self-fulfilling prophecy.

information regarding the availability and locations of alternative schools and programs; grade levels at which instruction was offered; data relating to enrollment including overall numbers of students enrolled in alternative schools and programs; and the existence of any problems, such as, capacity limitations and how school districts resolve these problems. A major finding of the survey is that school districts with high poverty concentrations are more likely than other districts to have alternative schools and programs for at-risk students (National Center for Education Statistics 2002).

Another fact regarding alternative education in the U.S. is that there are no clearly established, widely accepted definitional frameworks of alternative schools and programs (Holsey 2003). In short, there are no existing blueprints available for structuring alternative education schools or programs. As a result, it is difficult to determine which programs are successful and which ones are not, for how can an honest assessment of an alternative education program be conducted when there are no set criteria from which to make an evaluation? Even though proponents argue that alternative education can be effective with at-risk students, "there is still very little consistent, wide-ranging evidence of their effectiveness or even an understanding of their characteristics" (Lange and Sletten 2002, 2).

Although there are no established guidelines for alternative education in the U.S., researchers (Holsey 2003; Raywid 2001; Gregg 1999) have identified three distinct types of alternative education schools that are currently in operation: Type 1 programs—Academic; Type 2 programs—Discipline; and Type 3 programs—Therapeutic. In Type 1 programs, the emphasis is on developing and fostering academic success. The school provides an education for all kinds of students and enrollment is voluntary. Second, the school seeks to implement more innovative or challenging curricula. Third, students are held accountable for their own learning. School work is self-paced and students are often involved in vocational and community service projects. This type of alternative education program fosters flexibility, autonomy, and teacher/student empowerment (Holsey 2003).

For Type 2 programs, maintaining and sustaining discipline is the primary objective. Alternative education programs that focus on altering student behavior do so by segregating, containing, and reforming unruly students who have been sent to the program either by the school principal or law enforcement personnel for having committed a criminal offense. In this type of school, students are required to remain in the program for specific periods of time according to the severity of their misbehavior or infractions. With this type of alternative education school, the curriculum is limited, and students generally work alone completing assignments provided by their home schools, or homeroom teachers. The classroom climate is highly structured and punitive.

In Type 3 programs, the focus is on providing short-term therapeutic settings for students who have difficulty learning as the result of social and emotional problems. Enrollment in these programs is voluntary and the school's emphasis is on providing students with behavior remediation and rehabilitation as well as helping them to develop positive attitudes.

The Academic Performance of Latinos in K-12 Schools and their Increasing Enrollments in Alternative Education

According to the 2006 American Community Survey conducted under the auspices of the U.S. Census Bureau, the total number of people living in the U.S. is 299,398,485 of which 44,252,278 are Latino, the fastest growing ethnic group in the country (U.S. Census Bureau 2008). Of that figure, 28,339,354 are of Mexican descent making them the largest Latino sub-

group in the nation. Historically, the underachievement of Latinos has been a problem (Ream 2003). Unfortunately, for decades a deficit-based model has been used to explain the low performance of Latino students in school. The notion that their underachievement is the result of pathologies or deficits in their sociocultural background have influenced the way some educators view and work with Latino students in the classroom (Oakes 2004; Valencia 1986). Latinos have been described as "mentally retarded," linguistically handicapped, or culturally and linguistically deprived. In addition, discrimination has helped to compound the problems facing Latinos in education. How can Latino students succeed in school when the academic milieu is hostile toward them? Even the implementation of the best teaching practices will not help Latinos succeed if their teachers and school administrators regard them as culturally disadvantaged, culturally or genetically inferior, and consequently "less teachable," a term used by (Greene and Forster 2004) who argue that some students are "more teachable" than others.

Despite the claim that NCLB is making a significant impact on education, the U.S. is experiencing a persistent disparity in educational achievement between racial and ethnic groups (Flores 2007; Ream 2003). African American, Latino, and low-income students generally score lower on standardized tests than Whites. Mathematics is one content area in which Whites outperform African Americans, Latinos and low-income students. A predominance of the early research on achievement differences focused primarily between Blacks and Whites (Ashford 1997; Singham 1998) because for decades African Americans far outnumbered other minority groups. However, with the recent influx of Latinos, educational research has broadened the scope of its lens to include the achievement differences of Latinos and other ethnic groups as well. Currently, the supporters of NCLB claim that progress has been made in closing the achievement gap between White students and students of color, and their assertions are correct. However, a recent report on NCLB and its effect on improving student achievement suggest that "neither a significant rise in achievement, nor closure of the racial achievement gap is being achieved" (Orfield 2006, 5). Recent data released from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), the federal assessment system operated by the Educational Testing Service, referred to as the "nation's report card" supports Orfield's assertion. The NAEP reports an increase in mathematics scores in 2007 for grades 8 and 4. However, the improvement is minimal. For fourth-grade, the NAEP mathematics average is only 2 points higher than in 2005. For eighth-grade, the NAEP mathematics average score is a modest 3 points higher than in 2005 (NAEP 2007). Moreover, a recent report, *Tracking Achievement Gaps and Assessing the Impact of NCLB on the Gaps,* has determined that although there have been some minor gains on the NAEP in the area of mathematics, the growth pattern is similar to the one that existed before NCLB was enacted (Lee 2006). Therefore, we must exercise caution before concluding that NCLB has had an impact on the academic achievement of students.

Fortunately for Latinos and other racial and ethnic groups, more researchers are reframing the so-called achievement gap in mathematics and other subjects as a problem of unequal opportunities experienced by many low-income, Latino and African American students and are rejecting the notion of cultural deficits (Flores 2007; Stanton-Salazar 2004; Strutchens and Silver 2000). In general, "African American, Latino, and low-income students are less likely to have access to experienced and qualified teachers, more likely to face low expectations, and less likely to receive equitable per student funding" (Flores 2007, 1).

The National Center for Education Statistics (2004-2005) lists Latinos as the group having the highest number of dropouts. In California, for example, the number of Latino dropouts was 32,582 as compared to 9,040 for Blacks. In Texas, the data revealed 24,458

Latinos dropped out of school as compared to 7,476 for Blacks. Nationally, Latinos have a 50% drop out rate which follows a national trend in which drop-out rates are increasing for all students, with the average being approximately 30% (College Scholarship 2006). Recently, youth of Mexican-descent have been identified as among the most educationally at-risk of all Latino sub-groups (Committee for Hispanic Children and Families 2006; Cutri, Mayes, and Montero 2004; National Education Association 2003; Stanard 2003; Portes and Rumbaut 2001).

Currently, the research on Latinos enrolled in alternative education is limited. However, the research that is available suggests that among dropouts, "Latinos are more likely to attend an alternative school than any other race" (Oberhausen 2006, 14). For example, in the Walla Walla Public School District, located in Washington state, it was reported that "the number of Latino alternative education students is disproportionate to the general student population, sometimes exceeding 40%" (Alternative Education Subcommittee 2007, 2). Pursuant to the individuals working within this subcommittee "high school students will become more complex, not less so, and the clash of poverty, language, and family and cultural differences in this valley will always present students who are best served in an alternative learning program" (Alternative Education Subcommittee 2007, 2). It is most unfortunate that cultural differences should be described as a "clash" instead of as an opportunity for various ethnic and racial groups to come together to learn about the other, and to exchange ideas freely regarding what is best for their children.

The Adverse Effects of NCLB on the Academic Performance of Latino Students

The No Child Left Behind Act states that its primary goal is to improve the academic achievement of the following groups of students, "the economically disadvantaged students, students from major racial and ethnic groups; students with disabilities; migrant students, neglected or delinquent children, homeless children, and students with limited English proficiency" (NCLB 2001, 21, 34). Yet, it is these student populations that are being left behind. With its emphasis on quantitative research, NCLB is minimizing the impact of qualitative data on education research. The mandate states that school reform is predicated upon "effective methods and instructional strategies that are based on scientifically based research" (NCLB, 2001, 31). However, to better serve the needs of marginalized students, educators need to know and understand the sociological variables that place a child at risk, and qualitative research is an excellent conduit to providing educators with the tools they will need to help these students become successful in school.

Moreover, NCLB requires that children of every race or ethnic group attain 100% proficiency. However, since it has been in effect, no group has been able to meet that objective. In fact, this legislation has served to "tie the hands" of the very people who can help children improve academically, namely, school district superintendents, school administrators, and teachers. With its emphasis on accountability, NCLB has imposed a system of regulations such as standardized testing that force school districts to focus their resources primarily on the content areas that are assessed each year. Hence, teachers are pressured to teach to the test. Current research reveals that there has been a reduction in the time allotted for teaching art, music, social studies and physical education (Cawelti 2006; Whelan 2006). In 2003, the Council for Basic Education administered surveys to high school principals to ascertain how much time was devoted to teach each academic subject. The Council determined that school districts with high percentages of minorities and high-poverty districts provided less time to teaching geography, the arts, foreign languages, civics, and history in order to give more time to teach reading and mathematics (Rothstein and Jacobsen 2006). The data revealed that in New York, "twice as

many principals in high-minority schools reported such curricular shifts as did principals in mostly White schools" (Rothstein and Jacobsen 2006, 14).

A Need for the Arts

Developing and fostering the arts in curriculum enables students to develop creativity, understanding and acceptance of different points of view, critical judgment, and an appreciation of works of art. Moreover, research indicates that the arts increase imagination and creativity, symbolic understanding, critical thinking, student engagement and achievement motivation, conditional reasoning, and collaborative learning (Deasy 2008; McCoy 2007; Eisner 2004; Eisner 2002). Regrettably, with the pressure that NCLB has placed on school districts, the arts are being neglected and children are being deprived of a well-round education. Although a narrowed curriculum is detrimental to all youth, the students who speak little or no English are especially affected. Initially, they may be unable to communicate via the English language, but they can still communicate through drawing and dance. The arts are excellent conduits to helping students whose first language is other than English feel connected to their schools (Levin 2008). More and more research is identifying the benefits of teaching the arts to Latino students. Author (2006) and Donato and De Onis (1995) for example, have demonstrated that teachers working in inner-city schools can be successful with Mexican-American youth when the arts are integrated into the curriculum.

Another benefit associated with the arts is that they can reach students who are disengaged in learning either as a result of their misbehavior or their inability to succeed academically in school (Eger 2008). Encouraging students who are in most need of developing a "sense of belonging" can benefit from the arts. Participating in the school band, for example, can help academically disengaged students believe that coming to school is worthwhile because they feel that they are valued and that they play an important role in the school community. Students who were once deemed as "incorrigible" or "antisocial" can be high achievers in the arts. Moreover, success in the arts often leads to success in other areas of learning (Winner and Hetland 2000).

Weaving the Arts into a Multicultural/Anti-Racist Curriculum

Multicultural education has been espoused as an effective way to teach children in the U.S. Scholars in the fields of education and cultural anthropology have championed the need to recognize and value cultural diversity in public schools (Solorzano and Ornelas 2004; Valenzuela 1999; Nieto 1999). They argue that when minorities see that their culture is appreciated in the academic milieu, they are more inclined to view the school as a place where they can belong; and thereby, be more willing to engage in school work and in school activities. However, broadening or re-defining the American curriculum to include the histories and contributions of groups other than White Americans has not been easy. Critics of multiculturalism argue that multicultural education is divisive in that it threatens the very fabric of the American way of life (Berman 2008, 2A).[2] They believe that immigrants should

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[2] In Texas, the issue of illegal immigrants coming to the U.S. from Mexico has been a source of controversy in the media and in the State Legislature. Texas lawmaker, Leo Berman of Tyler, Texas who was interviewed by the news press stated: "By not stopping illegal immigration elected leaders are allowing 'multiculturalism' to prevail and flourish. We are a nation of laws, and if we continue on this path, we will lose the great republic that our forefathers gave to us."

assimilate and leave any vestiges of their cultural heritages behind. For decades, the issue of assimilation has been debated in the sociopolitical and pedagogical arenas.

Current research has determined that for some minorities, namely, African Americans and Latinos, the idea of assimilation is a form of "acting White" a pejorative characterization of a person who has lost her or his cultural identity and has embraced the values of mainstream society. Oppositional culture is the term used most often to explain an individual's refusal to adopt the values and customs of a dominant culture. Massey et. al (1991) define the theory of oppositional culture as a human condition in which:

> Involuntary minorities compare themselves with native majority members and
> are painfully aware of their disadvantaged status, which generates negative feelings
> toward the mainstream values and institutions. . .Involuntary minorities thus come to
> perceive knowledge of and participation in the dominant culture and its institutions as
> a betrayal of group loyalty and a threat to identity. They develop a defiant position
> vis a vis mainstream institutions and feel alienated from schools, learning,
> and education (8).

With this said, the paper will now address how the author designed an effective multicultural/anti-racist curriculum integrating the arts in order to: a) re-engage middle school alternative education students in learning and; b) to minimize the negative effects of oppositional culture on their learning. The author conducted a five-year case study in which she worked with Latino middle and high school students who were enrolled in alternative education programs operating in schools on the U.S.-Mexico border. The author began working with the students when they were in middle school and continued working with them as they progressed through high school.

The Early Years of the Study (fall 2002-spring 2004)

Six years ago, the author began a longitudinal study aimed at determining how middle school students enrolled in an alternative education program could be motivated or re-engaged in learning. The youngsters lived in a community in which 100% of the population is of Mexican descent and is located in a city along the U.S.-Mexico border that ranks as the fourth poorest zip code in the nation. The alternative education program consisted of a single classroom in which students from the sixth, seventh, and eighth grades who had committed serious disciplinary infractions either at school or in the neighborhood were sent. On several occasions, the students had been ordered by the judicial system to attend the program. The majority of the students exited the alternative education program after a period of six weeks, the average time students spend in the program as a result of their misbehavior. However, some students remained in the program for months, while others stayed in the program for two years. The study involved 52 students—40 males and 12 females. Throughout the study, the class consisted of more male than female students. On any given day, the ratio of males to females was ten to one. All students were of Mexican descent.

Methodology

The quantitative and qualitative methods used for collecting data throughout the study consisted of videotaped and non-videotaped class discussions, pre-and post-questionnaires, student interviews, student journals, student work, and drawings. Some of the class discussions that were not videotaped were transcribed. In the beginning some of the students felt

uncomfortable being videotaped. They were afraid that their comments could be relayed to their parents or parole officers.

During the first fourteen months of the longitudinal study, the author taught the students on Tuesdays and Thursdays for four hours; while their regular teachers taught them on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. The author reasoned that in order to get to know the students, she would have to work directly with them and be their teacher. In order to prevent any confusion for the students, the author taught the students the same curriculum that their teachers were teaching them. However, she had been given permission by the school principal and the school district to teach the curriculum according to how she deemed appropriate. Since the alternative education program followed a traditional format which included lecture, worksheets, textbooks, individualized work, and weekly written tests, the author decided to implement constructivist teaching and assessments to provide a variety of different instructional practices. Students learned primarily through authentic instruction and authentic assessments. Since most young adolescents prefer to work with peers (Daniels 2005) 65% of the lessons required group work and more than 80% of the curriculum involved reading and writing activities (Author, 2006). Rubrics and portfolios were the primary modes of assessment implemented throughout the study.

Although the author adopted the prescribed goals and objectives mandated by the state, notably, the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) as the frameworks for the curriculum, the author encouraged students to become "active" participants in the design and implementation of lessons and activities (Texas Education Agency 2004). For example, in the sixth grade, the TEKS require students to learn about large urban cities. However, the names of cities to be studied are unspecified. As a result, the author allowed the students to select the cities they wanted to investigate.

During the initial days of the study, the author believed that teaching at-risk students creatively via authentic instruction was the primary solution to helping them become re-engaged in learning. She was not expecting to encounter difficulties in working with the students. However, she soon realized that oppositional culture was adversely impacting the learning attitudes of several of the students (Author 2006). In short, they refused to speak and do school work in English for fear of betraying their Mexican heritage. For them, speaking English was a way of "selling out" their own heritage and at the same time a means to becoming an Anglo, or adopting the Anglo-American culture, a culture they believe is oppressive and discriminatory against Mexicans and people of Mexican descent (Author 2006).[3] During the second week of the study, students were administered a questionnaire asking them if they believed that speaking English made them Anglo (fig. 1). Seventy-five per cent of the students believed that speaking English made you Anglo; while 25% stated that it did not. As new students entered the program, they were given this questionnaire.

The author realized that in order to help the students understand that speaking English is not an act of betrayal, but rather a means to empowering themselves in the United States, she would need to design a curriculum that was not only multicultural but anti-racist as well.[4] Moreover, the curriculum would need to validate the histories and cultures of Mexicans and Mexican-Americans living in the U.S. Since the students came from the sixth, seventh, and

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[3] The term "Anglo" is a shorter version of the label Anglo-Saxon and is commonly used to refer to Whites.
[4] Multicultural education is a comprehensive term for a variety of strategies schools implement to respond to cultural differences. The aim of multicultural education is to recognize and celebrate cultural differences and contributions to the American way of life. An anti-racist curriculum also responds to cultural diversity, however, it provides discussions on racism, discrimination, and institutionalized oppression.

eighth grades, the author selected the seventh grade as the focal point of the curriculum. She reasoned that it would be easier to downgrade the content to a sixth-grade level, or upgrade it to the eighth grade if necessary. Furthermore, as a result of the students' reluctance to learn, and the fact that some of the students were working two or more grade levels below the sixth-grade, she decided to not only design lessons that were fun and creative, but to implement instructional strategies that could motivate the students to become re-engaged in learning. Since the arts are enjoyable, the author decided to include art and music into the lessons to make them more appealing and interesting to the students. Moreover, the author hoped that if the students were taught via mediums that were infrequently used to teach language arts and social studies, such as the cinema, the novelty factor might have a positive impact on their learning.[5]

The Use of Cinema

Using the cinema to teach a multicultural/anti-racist curriculum was highly effective in teaching the social studies and language arts, especially for those students who were reading below middle school grade levels. Students often asked if they could see a movie version of a book or story before they read it in class to help their comprehension of the content. For example, before the students read about the Civil War and Reconstruction in the U.S., they viewed the movie *Glory* (1989) to set the stage and to allow them to develop some understanding of what the Civil War was about and how it divided a nation. However, students also viewed movies while they were studying the content, or at the end as a culminating activity. The students were always encouraged to think critically about any film. For example, after viewing *Glory,* the students conducted discussions on slavery and the history of racism in the United States. Also, the cinema enabled the students to learn more about their Mexican heritage as well. Students saw movies about famous Mexican heroes, such as Emiliano Zapata and Benito Juarez that were made in the U.S and in Mexico. In addition, they searched the Inter Net and the school library to gain more information on these famous people.

For the language arts, the cinema was also an excellent teaching tool. In helping students to gain a better understanding of Edgar Allan Poe's *The Tell-Tale Heart*, for example, the author showed the movie before they actually read the story. Allowing the students to see the movie beforehand, as well as having them identify and look up the definitions for the most challenging words in the story before they began reading helped to minimize any difficulty in understanding Poe's work. Moreover, the cinema enabled the students to develop some understanding of the histories and cultures of other countries. Watching the movie, *The Thirteenth Warrior* (1999) exposed the students to the Vikings and although the motion picture industry may have embellished or distorted some of the facts associated with Viking society, the students were engaged in the movie, nevertheless, and in the lessons that followed. The students were more willing to read about the Vikings in their textbooks and in other books as well. Also, they enjoyed doing the written activities, such as, writing a letter to one of the Vikings in the movie describing what it is like to be a student living in the U.S. In addition, the students learned the importance of not believing everything that appears on the television screen.

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[5] Science was not included in the curriculum because it was taught only on Mondays and Wednesdays, the days in which the author was not present. Also, mathematics was not included because the school implemented a prescribed mathematics curriculum that did not allow for variation in content or instructional strategies.

The Use of Art and Music

Art and music were included in most lessons and activities of the multicultural/anti-racist curriculum. Along with an increase in student participation, the author detected a change in behavior and attitude for many of the students. In the beginning days of the study, the students whose first language was Spanish had difficulty communicating in English, and as a result, often became frustrated and angry. They often stated, "I can't do it." However, with time and with many opportunities to express themselves through art and music, the students became less agitated in learning and working in English, and became more self-confident in their abilities to complete assignments. Students were given the opportunities to draw how they felt, instead of always having to write down their sentiments in words. The author purchased brushes, paints, watercolors, charcoal pencils, color pencils, crayons, markers, and clay, glue, construction paper of all colors and size, and sketch pads for students to use. Also, books on drawing and art were purchased to help the students develop their skills at drawing and using watercolors.[6] Field trips to the local art museum and the university where students saw art exhibits were also part of the curriculum. In addition to reading and writing, most of the social studies and language arts' lessons provided some form of art activities. Students were asked to draw, paint, or sculpt. They often worked in groups to make collages or to work with papier mache.

Music also played a special role in the implementation of the curriculum in that it helped to establish a harmonious classroom atmosphere. Some of the students said that they enjoyed listening to music while they worked individually or with their peers. Also, for the students who had anger management issues, they stated that listening to music as they worked helped them feel calm and relaxed. Students were encouraged to bring music CDs of their own. However, they were not allowed to bring songs that contained obscenities. It was important for the students to understand that even though they had more of a say in what they wanted to learn, they were still required to act appropriately and to follow school and classroom rules.

In keeping with a multicultural/anti-racist curriculum, the students listened to music from different countries and cultures. For example, students listened to music from India to hear the sounds of the sitar. Field trips to the music department at the university helped the students learn that college students can pursue degrees in music which can lead to careers as professional musicians.

Results of the Multicultural/Anti-Racist Curriculum on Student Learning

Assessing the effects of the curriculum came from three sources: the director of the alternative education program, the students, and students' reading test scores on the yearly standardized test. On a written evaluation of the program, the director, Carlos Reyes, affirmed that the "curriculum is effective because the children enjoyed what they were doing, which made them want to complete the assignments." He stated that there are major benefits to be gained from the implementation of a multicultural curriculum. First, Reyes suggested that reading stories about characters that come from the same cultural backgrounds as the students encourages them to realize that their culture is being validated in the schools. Second, he believed that students are more "motivated to want to read and do the work because they can buy into the curriculum." Reyes also wrote:

"The curriculum was successful. I believe that their reading and writing skills have improved because they were always reading and writing and with all that practice they improved. It shows in their work (i.e., their spelling

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[6] The author received a grant to purchase materials and resources for her curriculum.

> has improved). Also, the curriculum was set at the students' level so it
> was very doable. Plus the students understood what they had to do. They
> enjoyed doing her work. . .There was a huge amount of group work."

One hundred percent of the children who participated in the study for six weeks or more found the lessons enjoyable and meaningful (Author 2006). They expressed a desire for their teachers to include more art and music into the curriculum.

Examining standardized test scores in reading on the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills Test (TAKS) revealed that 85% of the students showed improvement. Reading was the subject selected to be assessed because this content area is measured via the TAKS in the sixth, seventh, and eighth grades, so it was possible to determine if there had been academic growth from one year to the next (Texas Education Agency 2004). Unfortunately, at the middle school level, social studies are not assessed yearly. Social studies content are measured in the eighth grade only, making it difficult for a yearly assessment of both content areas. The students who demonstrated the most gain, however, were enrolled in the program for 6 months or longer. They scored a minimum of 56 to 252 points higher in 2003-2004 than in the previous year, 2002-2003. The two students whose scores improved 200+ points were in the program the entire academic year due to a continuous pattern of offenses. After reviewing the students' test scores, the school principal stated in an interview, "I looked at the data and I was very impressed with the gains the children made. . .I have 875 students on this campus who have been labeled at risk." So any gains in student achievement are important. In this same interview, she presented her views on the need for developing and implementing multicultural curricula, "If you use books that address our culture and talk about people such as Cesar Chavez, that's going to make the children feel proud and they will have a greater interest in reading (Rosa Lovelace interview 2005).[7]

In addition, the students' attitudes toward speaking and working in English changed. As students left the program, they were given a post-questionnaire. This questionnaire revealed that 15% still believed that speaking English makes you Anglo; while 85% believed that it did not (fig. 2). The children said that "presenting the learning of English as an empowerment tool helped the majority of them to realize that speaking English is not a betrayal of their Mexican heritage, rather, it is simply a means to helping them even the playing field and that they would not become Anglos if they did use the language" (Author 2006, 10-11). As Jorge wrote, "With my brown skin, eyes, and black hair, they (Anglos) will never see me as one of them. So it doesn't matter if I do English." I want a beter [sic] job than my dad has. He works in construcshun [sic]." Moreover, reading and learning more about the Mexican culture and reading stories in which Latinos were the primary characters helped the students develop a stronger connection to the school because they felt that their culture was being validated through the curriculum. As Brian wrote, "I like reading about our people. I'm proud of being a Chicano, and when I read about guys like me, I enjoy it. We don't have to read about us all the time—but

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[7] Although the author believes that the curriculum played a role in the success of the students, she is quick to acknowledge that student success was the result of "team work." The teachers who taught the students on Monday, Wednesdays, and Fridays also contributed to the increase in test scores. Also, the role of parents and family members cannot be discounted, or the hard work of the students themselves. It is impossible to quantify the impact of any curriculum on student learning because of the many variables that affect student learning.

now and then. Why do we always have to read about white kids? There [sic] world isn't my world you know."[8]

Limitations of the Study

During the 14 month study, fifty-two students were enrolled in the alternative education program. Fifty of them exited the program and returned to the regular classroom, leaving two students who remained in the program throughout the entire study. Of the 50 children who left the program, data for only 20 were recorded, because those 20 were in the program for at least six weeks. The other students who left were in the program for only a couple of weeks or days, insufficient time for serious data to be collected. Therefore, the total number of students whose data was recorded was 20. A second limitation of this study is the fact that the author was unable to ascertain if the students in this alternative education class were able to transfer their motivation to learn to their regular education classes. The author's research objectives did not include monitoring the behavior of the students once they exited the alternative education program (Author 2006).

The Latter Years of the Study (fall 2005-spring 2007)

During the latter years of the study, the author continued working with some of the students who participated in the early years of the investigation. Her goals were to determine if oppositional culture was still impacting their learning. The relationship with the students, however, changed in that she no longer taught a multicultural curriculum for two days a week. Instead, she worked with the students in groups and presented multicultural themes to the class. The participants in this phase of the study consisted of high school students who had been in the early years of the investigation and were still in alternative education; students who had exited the program, but were now in regular education; and students who were not in the early years of the study but were now in the program. For the students who were no longer in alternative education, the high school's at-risk coordinator called them out of their regular education classes to meet with the author in the library. For the students enrolled in the program, the author met with the students in the alternative education classroom.

Methodology

During the latter years of the study, the author worked with 278 students (204 males) and (74) females. At the completion of the study, 51 boys and 32 girls had moved; 47 boys and 23 girls dropped out of school; 23 boys and 11 girls continued entering and exiting alternative education and correctional facilities; and 83 males and 8 girls returned to regular education. As a result, the total number of students at the end of the study was 125. This number includes students enrolled in alternative education and correctional facilities (34) and students in regular education (91).

Due to the large number of students in the study, the author divided the children into groups of 12 and worked with these groups on different days. In addition, the author volunteered

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[8] In the curriculum, students learned about race and ethnicity. Ethnic labels were defined as: Americans are whites who are born in the United States; Latinos are individuals who are born in the countries of the Western Hemisphere south of the U.S. having Spanish or Portuguese as their official languages; Mexicans are people who are born in Mexico; Mexican-Americans are people of Mexican descent who are born in the U.S.; Chicanos are people of Mexican ancestry who are born in the U.S. but have an awareness of a historically oppressive relationship with Mexico and the U.S. The students preferred referring to themselves as Chicanos.

three hours of each month at the juvenile detention center as a teacher's aid. Spending time at the correctional facility allowed the author to work with students who were in the study but who were incarcerated awaiting their trials or completing their sentences in the county boot camp program. Some of the qualitative and quantitative research methods used to gather data in the middle school alternative education program were also used in the high school study, namely, questionnaires, videotaped and non-videotaped discussions, and student work.

The cinema continued to serve as the primary vehicle for delivering content to the students. The movies viewed by the students included, *To Sir with Love* (1967)*, The Last of the Mohicans* (1992)*, The Man in the Iron Mask* (1998)*, The Lion in Winter* (2004)*, Luther* (2004)*, Escape from Sobibor* (1987)*, Lawrence of Arabia* 1962)*, Blackrobe* (1991)*, Conspiracy* (2001)*, Rob Roy* (1995)*, and Atila* (2000)*.* These movies all contain themes that fall under critical multiculturalism. For example, viewing *To Sir with* Love helped the students realize that students in other countries also struggle in finding their own cultural and social identities.

During their hour-long sessions, students continued to learn about cultural diversity by reading short stories, viewing films, discussing current events, writing papers, and talking about issues that they wished to discuss. The students maintained journals in which they could write down their thoughts regarding topics discussed in group sessions and were given opportunities to share their views with the group at the next month's meeting if they wished. The students said that sometimes they needed time to reflect on what had been discussed in the group, or to collect their thoughts. Students' journals were never read by the author unless students asked her to comment on particular entries they had written.

To determine if oppositional culture was still at work, the author gave students who participated in the early years of the study an anonymous questionnaire to complete. The students were asked if they still believed that speaking English is a betrayal of their Mexican heritage and to explain their reasons. Only 15% of the students still believed that speaking English was a betrayal of their Mexican heritage, 85% however, believed that it was not (fig. 3). Of the newer students who joined the study in high school, 75% of the students believed that it was; while 25% stated that it was not. However, as these students became more and more exposed to the issues of cultural diversity, multiculturalism, and racism, their percentages dropped as well. They went from 75% believing that speaking English is a betrayal to only 12% (fig. 4).

The author opted to administer a questionnaire instead of conducting interviews because she was concerned that the students might not be willing to share their views openly if they were facing her during an interview. Data was collected only for students enrolled in the alternative education program for a period of six weeks or more and for students who had been participating in the study for months or years.

Limitations

The limitations for the first half of the study were also present in the second phase of the investigation, namely, that students were entering and exiting the alternative education program continually. After six weeks, some would leave while others remained, and new students were being admitted into the program on a regular basis. Both the director and the author agreed that it was important to continue on with the curriculum regardless if new students were entering the program. They believed that the students who were in the study since the beginning might become bored if lessons and activities were repeated constantly to accommodate the newer students. As the middle school director of the alternative education program had done, the high

school at-risk coordinator worked with the new students on the days that the author was not present in order to help them catch up with the other students.

Conclusion

The No Child Left Behind Act has been the subject of much debate in the sociopolitical and pedagogical arenas. Although the proponents of this legislation believe that it has helped to improve the academic achievement of minority students in schools, the data reveal that it has not. One may argue, if NCLB is so successful, then why are the numbers of alternative education schools and programs on the rise, and why are there more Latino and Black students enrolled in these programs than Whites? Second, the supporters of NCLB argue that by mandating school districts to focus their energies and resources on the teaching of reading, mathematics, and the language arts, all students will become proficient and successful learners. But, where are the arts? It is the very notion of limiting or narrowing the curriculum that is negatively impacting the academic performance of Latino students because many of them enter the system without speaking English. Therefore, to expect them to succeed academically during their initial years in the U.S. without instruction in the arts is ludicrous. The arts provide students the opportunities to communicate through other mediums besides speech. Students can express themselves through art, music, dance, and drama; and experiencing success in these areas will only encourage them to become successful in the other disciplines as well. In effect, it is NCLB that is contributing to the poor academic performance of Latino students in the U.S. by limiting their access to the arts.

Although the author's qualitative case study has focused its attention on how the arts can be used to improve the academic achievement of Latino youth, it does not meet the research requirements that are specified in NCLB. In short, the author did not use "effective methods and instructional strategies that are based on scientifically based research" (NCLB 2001, 31). However, it takes more than a series of quantitative studies to determine how educators can help students improve academically in the classroom. Granted, quantitative research is valuable and can provide insight into how we can improve the quality of education, but we should not minimize the impact that qualitative research has on teaching and learning. Qualitative studies can help explain why marginalized adolescent youth misbehave, and can also provide insights into how young people view the world. The intent of NCLB may be to improve academic success for all students. However, it is seriously shortchanging Latino students and undermining their academic success.

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Figure 1

Name_____

Does Speaking English Make You an Anglo?

Pre-Questionnaire

1. Do you believe that speaking English makes you an Anglo? Circle yes or no. Explain why.

2. Describe how you feel about Anglos.

Figure 2

Name_____

Does Speaking English Make You an Anglo?

Post-Questionnaire

1. Do you believe that speaking English makes you an Anglo? Circle yes or no. Explain why.

2. Describe how you feel about Anglos? If you changed your opinion, tell me why? Also, list and describe the

factors that helped you to change your opinion?

Figure 3

Name_____

Pre-Questionnaire

1. Is speaking in English a betrayal to your Mexican heritage? Circle yes or no and explain in detail.

Figure 4

Name_____

Post-Questionnaire

1. Is speaking in English a betrayal to your Mexican heritage? Circle yes or no and explain in detail.

2. If you changed your opinion, tell me why? Also, list and describe the factors that helped you to change your

opinion?

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