*Journal of Agricultural Education, 61(4), 143-155*
*https://doi.org/10.5032/jae.2020.04143*

# ¡Somos Nosotros! Lived Experiences of Latinx ELL Youth Enrolled in Secondary Agricultural Education

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**Abstract**

*This study examines the inherent relationship Latinx English-Language Learners students have with their agriculture teacher and the overall agricultural education program at four rural high schools. It is based upon a series of 11 focus group interviews with two U.S. born and 27 immigrant students from Central America and Mexico, all of whom were in at least their second year of enrollment in secondary agricultural education. The study also includes direct observations of classrooms and peer interactions. Four themes emerged that reflect White students creating an unaccepting dynamic, ignorance toward the Latinx students passion for agriculture, high respect toward the agriculture teacher and a program culture that is currently not relatable to Latinx youth. Recommendations for pedagogical approaches that encourage English comprehension should be implemented into the agricultural education programs along with bold initiatives that gives voice for Latinx students throughout the program, specifically the FFA organization. Additional research that further replicates this study is necessary as well as an understanding of teacher's current knowledge and skills for teaching Latinx ELL youth.*

***Keywords:*** English-language learners; Hispanic youth; Critical Race; Latinx; Latino(a); English as a second language; multicultural; diversity

## Introduction

Until recently, Latinx students have not been widely studied within career and technical education programs. Even so, a subgroup of students, English-Language Learners (ELLs), have hardly been considered in vocational education. In the United States, the Hispanic population has risen dramatically since the 1970s (Ennis et al., 2011). With growth has come a drastic increase in the number of students, the vast majority of them Hispanic (Echevarria et al., 2006), with limited English proficiency. These students are often referred in disproportionate numbers to special education (Gunn et al., 2005). If not in a special education classroom, nearly 85% of the remaining students will spend time in mainstream classrooms without support for language development (Watts-Taffe & Truscott, 2000). Unfortunately, less than 30% of mainstream teachers are prepared to serve those students in their classes (Short, 2013; Echevarria et al., 2006). Because of these barriers to academic success, most ELL students underperform because they must take subject tests prior to English proficiency (Tong et al., 2014; Short et al., 2012).

Studies have examined English-Language Learners and their academic performance in mainstream classes based off the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol, or SIOP model, used by

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their teachers (Daniel & Conlin, 2015; Short et al., 2012; Echevarria et al., 2006). In addition, studies were conducted which looked at an interdisciplinary approach in mainstream classrooms to foster not only English but content curriculum proficiency, which has shown to be successful (Tong, et al., 2014; Valle et al., 2013; Brown, 2007; Williams & Williams, 2000). However, these studies only measured effective teaching strategies and student academic achievement through standardized testing over a period of time.

Limited involvement exists in the examination of Latinx youth and their experiences within agricultural education. Of the most recent research, one study addressed the potential barriers to Latinx student enrollment, which included social perceptions and patterns within the classroom and FFA programs (Elliott & Lambert, 2018). In the 2018 study, the major barrier was traditional agriculture students' perceived conceptions of Latinx youth. A 2009 study found participation in agricultural education and FFA membership are positively influenced by a variety of areas, but importantly, peer opinion (Roberts et al., 2009). When exploring the recruitment of minority students into college agricultural programs, Wiley et al. (1997) uncovered similar barriers to enrollment. Another study explored White student's perceptions of minority peers in a university college of agriculture where, "The findings show that there is in fact a relationship between colorblind racial attitudes and attitudes toward immigrants. As the level of colorblindness increased, attitudes toward immigrants decreased or became more negative in nature" (Rodriguez & Lamm, 2016, p 115).

Additionally, while student demographics become more diverse, enrollment in career and technical education programs, such as agriculture, do not reflect school populations. While minority student populations in public schools have increased significantly (Valle et al., 2013), the percent of minority students enrolled in agriculture programs is often disproportionately low compared to diverse school populations (Talbert & Larke, 1995). Furthermore, though student demographics are increasingly more diverse, teacher diversity and concern for teaching diverse students are low, especially within agricultural education (Vincent & Torres, 2015; Luft, 1996). While there is a desire and need to produce culturally competent students, most universities still lack sufficient cultural diversity education. Without this exposure, agricultural students stand to enter the workforce with inaccurate perceptions of diversity and are unprepared to work in diverse environments (Rodriguez & Lamm 2016).

All things considered, there is a unique opportunity to study student academic progress in English and agricultural content proficiency, as well as the social dynamic of these learning environments by interviewing students directly, which has not been widely done in modern research efforts, especially within career and technical education. Of studies highlighting marginalized youth, research from the past ten years is difficult to find within the agricultural education profession resulting in our dependence of work from the 1990s.

## Theoretical Framework

The foundational theories of Critical Race Theory and Latino Critical Theory assisted in designing the framework of the study. The overarching goal of Critical Race Theory (CRT) is to understand the oppressive aspects of society and work to alter them on an individual as well as societal basis. At its formulation in the 1970s, CRT was an evaluative approach to the legal system that has expanded into evaluating all lived aspects among people of color (Delgado & Stefanic, 2017). Eventually, scholars began its application to education in the 1990s as an approach to examining curriculum, instructional strategies, and assessment methods equitable for all students (Haskins & Singh, 2015). Scholars ultimately aim to transform the relationship among race, racism, and power through CRT.

According to Dixson (2017), there are five core principles of Critical Race Theory, in its application in education:

> 1. *Racism is ordinary, not atypical*. As it is permanently ingrained in the legal system, culture, and individual psychology. It intersects with sex, class, ethnicity, and sexual orientation. The principle asserts that institutionally prejudice can result in a loss of power and voice in some groups, and the intersectionality of multiple marginalized identities can generate further alienation (Soloranzo & Bernal, 2001) further hindering the educational experience of marginalized populations.
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> 2. *Current bureaucratic systems advance the interests of elites.* The principle challenges the dominant ideology that the education system is race neutral and provides equal opportunities to all students (Villalpando, 2004; Freire et al., 2017). Research shows that race-neutral or color-blind policies only harm communities of color and further advance the power-dynamics of White people versus people of color (Delgado & Stefanic, 2017).
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> 3. *Races are categories that society creates, manipulates, or retires when convenient for the dominant groups*. Particular cultural groups have been historically notorious for establishing racial categories. The concept of race benefits makes "others" feel marginalized for having skin color, hair flow and diets that don't reflect the dominant group (Delgado & Stefanic, 2017).
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> 4. *The dominant group characterize minorities at different times convenient to the needs of the majority.* Unfortunately, the dominant group makes decisions and rules, with intentions of serving as beneficial, that create additional conditions and steps for marginalized groups. Within the context of schools, these rules affect the academic advancement and obtainment of ethnically diverse youth (Ladson-Billings, 1994).
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> 5. *The act of storytelling is crucial for understanding how to create societal change*. A commitment to social justice in the form of the marginalized sharing of experiences as an act of empowerment and coping. These narratives can cause cognitive dissonance in those who listen and encourage them to examine and challenge their own ethnocentrism (Haskins & Singh, 2015).

From these five tenets, Latino Critical Theory (LatCrit) was created as an extension to Critical Race Theory. Encompassing issues experienced by Latinx students that are more specific than the guiding principles of CRT provides, Latino Critical Theory can be thought of as a supplement to CRT. LatCrit is used to reveal the ways Latinx students experience education according to their race, class and sex with the additional lens of their immigration status, native language, ethnicity and culture (Elliot & Lambert, 2018; Solórzano & Bernal, 2001). Researchers must challenge the current educational practices that marginalize Latinx students and recognize the patterns of racial inequality that exist in classrooms. This intersection of CRT with LatCrit helps provide the context for Latinx students in agricultural education. Identifying the relationship between race, racism and power, we can begin to change the experiences of Latinx students, and other students of color, towards one of empowerment.

Although Latinx are regularly classified as the highest growing subpopulation in the United States (Schaeffer, 2019), minimal research has been done in regard to the Latinx experience in agricultural education. Of the studies that have been conducted, researchers have slowly begun to use LatCrit as a method for helping to identify barriers for Latinx in agricultural education. Elliott and Lambert (2018) use LatCrit as a lens for examining Latinx experiences in their agricultural education programs. The researchers identified the "inequities students perceive in their respective agricultural education programs between rural and non-rural students" (p. 198) in addition to three major findings revolved around the concept of rural privilege.

Other studies that focus on Latinx students in agricultural education do not use LatCrit as a foundation. Researchers currently focus on engagement or disengagement of Latinx youth and outline barriers which include teacher engagement, parent involvement, and peer opinion, to their entry and retention in agricultural education programs and FFA (Suárez-Orozco, et al., 2010). Through a LatCrit view, researchers can begin identifying the larger relationships between race, racism, and power in the classroom that would lead to systematic change instead of small, incremental adaptations for agricultural educators.

The current study and research team focused on LatCrit and CRT to examine the institutional policies, programs, and practices that may interfere with or empower Latinx students' ability to receive quality agricultural education opportunities, while also considering their additional statuses of ethnicity, language proficiency, and immigrant status. Both theories provide a critique to the educational system in the continued challenges facing racially diverse students.

## Purpose

The broader purpose of this multiple-case design study was to explore the perceptions and lived experiences of Latinx English-Language Learners students. More specifically, the research team analyzed the overall agricultural education program according to aid provided for English language development, content learning, and social development. The objective of this study was to describe the perceived culture of agricultural education, including the classroom teacher. The research aligns with the guidelines set forth by the National Research Agenda, specifically addressing research priority area 4: *Meaningful and Engaged Learning in All Environments* (Edgar et al., 2016) focusing the inquiry toward "How can delivery of educational programs in agriculture continually evolve to meet the needs and interests of students" (p. 39).

## Methods

The multiple-case design study examined Latinx English-Language Learners (referred to as ELLs from this point forward) youth in four secondary agricultural education programs in various regions of Kentucky. In explaining what a case is, Yin (2018) suggested the term refers to an event, an entity, an individual or even a unit of analysis. It is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context using multiple sources of evidence. In the essence of the current study, the research team sought to explain the living experiences of ELLs in rural secondary agricultural education programs within a non-bordering state. Because the study encompassed schools within multiple regions of the state, the multiple-case design was implemented (Patton, 2015).

By utilizing the most recent Census data, the research team obtained the top ten counties, identified as non-urban, with the largest Latinx population. All schools were identified that had secondary agricultural education within each county ($n$ = 17). First year teachers were removed from the study as they were still in the process of developing rapport with their classes; thus, three schools were omitted. One member of the faculty team contacted each school requesting their participation. Six schools responded. Two failed to obtain administrative consent and were omitted from the study. After receiving approval from the Institutional Review Board, consent was obtained from each school administrator and from the parent of each ELL student. Due to the possibility of non-English speaking parents, an approved Spanish consent was provided to all guardians. Of the four participating schools, the research team obtained consent from 100% ($n$ = 29) of the ELL students enrolled in an agriculture course. Table 1 provides a summary of the participating school demographics. The student participants ($n$ = 29) were primarily Juniors and Seniors, with varying levels of English comprehension, though the majority self-identified as being less than 15% proficient.

**Table 1**

*Background Data of School Participants*

| | Total School Enrollment | Number of ELL Participants | % ELL population within the school |
|---|---|---|---|
| School 1 | 850 | 3 | 8.0 |
| School 2 | 650 | 15 | 11.0 |
| School 3 | 1165 | 4 | 7.0 |
| School 4 | 1090 | 7 | 17.0 |

Interviews occurred in the form of focus groups no larger than three; thus 11 focus groups were formed. All interviews were conducted with two of the three research team members present. Although the research team had 20 questions designed to last an hour, the interviews resembled guided conversations rather than structured queries. Rubin and Rubin (2011) believed that the actual stream of questions in a case study is likely to be fluid rather than rigid, also referred to as "unstructured interviews" (Weiss, 1994, p. 207-208). The interviews ranged from 45 minutes to 90 minutes.

Since the research team visited each school, direct observations occurred as well. The team watched the social and environmental conditions that were available within the school visit. Such observations serve as another source of evidence in obtaining triangulation (Stake, 1995). The data collection, through observation, was more casual than formal. According to Yin (2018), casual direct observations occur through fieldwork, including those occasions during which other evidence, such as interviews, is being collected. The research team paid attention to student expressions on particular questions, nervous tendencies, and changes in mannerisms. Within the classroom, the team evaluated the approach of the teacher, the classroom environment, and the conversations among all students enrolled. The team spent 1-2 full days at each school.

After each school visit, the research team wrote in their reflective journal and then met the following day to debrief their findings. Following the first interview, the research team followed Yin's (2018) approach to asking questions and did not expand the questions beyond Level 1 and Level 2. After the debrief meeting, questions were rearranged and reworded in order to determine if a pattern within the responses would occur in multiple cases; hence, Level 3 and Level 4 questions emerged.

To assist in the trustworthiness of the student responses, one team member conducted all interviews while another team member took field notes and direct observations. Follow-up interviews and meetings occurred for member checking and to confirm triangulation between all meetings. Throughout the study, a trusted colleague with experience in Latino studies assisted in peer debriefing. All interviews were recorded and later transcribed for coding and interpretation. All transcriptions, direct observations and field notes were coded through the lens of LatCrit. Following the model set by Miles and Huberman (1994), the team first established specific primary codes through specific chunks of text. As the study continued, the research team engaged in revising codes followed by the naming of codes to create themes. Finally, the research team engaged in a series of code checking, followed by code revisions. Code checking continued until the code agreement score was above the 70% intercoder reliability set goal (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

The research team realizes that previously lived experiences play a role in the facilitation and interpretation of the study. In order to mitigate the effect that preconceptions can have to the research process, the team acknowledged personal biases in two forms of bracketing: a) research assumptions and b) hermeneutic (Fischer, 2009) throughout the research process. At the time of the study, one

member of the team had over ten years of experience in research within the context of multiculturalism and underserved youth populations. Another member identified as a first-generation US citizen with a family origin residing in Mexico. The final member was an upcoming classroom teacher with an interest in teaching agriculture to ELL youth.

## Findings

The student interview responses combined to reveal broad themes regarding the experience of Latinx English-Language Learners in the participating agricultural education programs. The themes that emerge stem from two major areas: the perceived culture of the program and the perceived role of the agriculture teacher. Within the context of the perceived culture of the program, the ELL students believe their White peers defined the culture of the program and as a result, the programs are unwelcoming to non-White students. In every focus group interview, the participants continued to proclaim a concern that established two themes: 1) traditional, White agricultural students do not acknowledge their presence, much less their role within the agricultural education program; and 2) the program culture led ELL students to believe that they were not valued as agriculturalist. The first theme was frustrating, yet comical to many of the students, but the second was upsetting as the ELL students took pride in their passion for agriculture.

### Theme 1: Do You See Us

Latinx ELL students perceived the culture of the agricultural education program as exclusive, untrustworthy, and lonely for Latinx youth. Across the different agricultural education programs, students consistently spoke about the lack of interaction between themselves and the other (primarily White) students enrolled in the secondary agricultural classes. In an interview, one junior, Julian, spoke about how lonely his experience had been "The students see me different, I'm the only Hispanic in the class, I'm kind of the outlier." Julian later spoke about feeling ignored in his classes, "There's always different groups in school. There are some groups I just don't connect with, so I sit on the outside." (What groups are those?) "Like country groups to be honest- the kids with lift kits, they hunt deer, I'm not that kind of guy." His other classmate agreed with these feelings of being ignored in the agricultural courses, saying, "Some of them don't like Hispanics because of their parents, and I'm alright with that, you know, I just don't talk to them." Further feelings of loneliness were discussed at a different school. When asked if the student had friends in his agriculture course, the student responded with "No, I only have friends like me… like, other Hispanics."

To analyze the feelings of mistrust between Latinx ELL students and the White students, the researcher began to ask participants if they were facing discrimination and their agriculture classmates were around, would their agricultural classmates come to their defense? Most students agreed that the other, primarily White, agricultural students *might* say something but, "they would probably just watch… Actually, yeah, they would probably just ignore it honestly." One girl, who had stayed quiet for most of the interview, spoke up after hearing this question. From the back of the table, she said the agriculture students wouldn't come to her defense because "No nos conocen," which translates to "They don't know us." At another high school, the conversation went as follows.

The researcher first asked, "¿Crees que los estudiantes de ag te defienden?" / *"Would the ag students defend you?"*
Student immediately responds, "No."
The other students chuckle.
The first student argues, "No, es en siero." / "*No, I'm being serious.*"
The researcher asks, "¿Qué quieres decir?" / "*What do you mean?"*
The student states, "Se apoyan más entre Americanos que apoyar a uno como ti." / *"The Americans would rather root for each other than support someone like you* [referring to the researcher who was of Mexican descent]*."*

**Theme 2: We Love Agriculture, Too**

Across all four high schools, ELL students knew their classmates did not see them as friends, and if they did, chose not to interact with them despite a mutual interest in agriculture. When asked what their parents thought of the student's decision to enroll in agriculture classes, most students spoke of the pride their parents had in the course selection. Luz, a junior wanting to one day be a veterinarian, said:

> Latinos have more consideration and we respect it [agriculture] because it's something that provides jobs and our families do it and that's how we get food on the table. Because my father works on the farm, that's why I respect it and don't make fun of it because he didn't get the education we did. He still works on the farm, so I respect that and this class.

In another response to the question, Oscar told us, "En verdad, están en totalmente acuerdo porque mis padres allá en Guatemala tienen su rancho, producen leche. Me llama la atención porque me gustaría especializarme en algo así." ("*In truth, they're totally in agreement because my parents over in Guatemala have their ranch-- they produce milk. It catches my attention because I would like to specialize in something like that.*") Having his family active in the Guatemalan agriculture industry inspired Oscar to enroll in his high school agriculture classes. There is a clear passion for the agriculture industry, and it is reinforced by Oscar, Luz, and their Latinx classmates. One summarized the Latinx passion for agriculture among the students, "I think there's more interest in the subject because us Latinos have survived off agriculture."

Although some ELL students were randomly placed in their agricultural courses, nearly all of the students spoke positively about a personal experience or familial history with the agriculture industry. With this passion for agriculture, connections between all students should be easy to identify and enhance with class discussions. In one specific class period, this does seem to be the case when Julian said, "People look at it [agriculture classes] like it's only for Whites, but Hispanics can join in, have fun, and enjoy it. Me personally, I enjoy it."

The second major area where two additional themes emerged involved the ELL students' perceived role of their agriculture teacher. Like in many cases, the personal, one-on-one relationship established by the agriculture teacher was positive. In every focus group interview, the participants continued to share similar messages about their agriculture teacher that the research team felt confident in two established themes. One of which, the participants truly believed their teacher had an interest in their personal well-being. They did not feel threatened, rather safe and respected. Secondly, although the agriculture teacher took the time to know many of the students, additional efforts did not exist that encouraged a welcoming infusion of Latin culture within the program.

**Theme 3: You've Got Our Back**

Across the four high schools, Latinx ELL students had a good relationship with their agricultural education teacher. Visiting the campuses allowed the research team to see the positive interactions between the students and the teacher during passing periods, lunch, and the time before and after school. In one of the agriculture classrooms, the research team observed and reflected upon the flags of different countries representing the student enrollment, the attempts to speak Spanish with the students, and the genuine interest in the students' lives outside of the classroom. In one setting, the agriculture teacher had proudly displayed a flag from a South American country by his desk-- a gift from one of his Latinx students. Another student, Alejandro, spoke about his teacher, "Yeah he helps me out, he helps me when I don't understand; sometimes he tries in Spanish, he helps me out when he can." Another student talked about his personal connection with his teacher and the investment the teacher had in his home life, "Me and [teacher] talked about problems in Mexico, like gang related issues. He asked about my family and tried to get to know me more from the beginning." In both situations, the research team noted the sincerity each student took in explaining the compassion of the

agriculture teacher and, besides their appointed ELL teacher, was more passionate than many of their core content teachers.

When asked if teachers would come to their defense if they were to ever face discrimination, 24 out of the 28 students agreed that their agriculture teacher would do so. In most focus groups, students spoke about instances in which the agriculture teacher defended them in the past. After asking the initial question, two students quickly replied, "Yeah," and began to laugh. After the researcher asked why they were laughing, one student responded, "There was a time where one of my friends called me a 'beaner' as a joke, and [teacher] did *not* like it. I feel like he wants to get more involved with the Hispanic culture. He knows how to speak Spanish and we talk sometimes." Even in programs where the English proficiency of the students was almost non-existent, Latinx students were quick to agree that their agriculture teacher would rise to their defense. After hearing the question in one interview, three soft-spoken girls all nodded and responded in unison, "Sí, el sí nos defende," ("*Yes, he would defend us."*).

In two of the high schools, distinct ELL coordinators were hired to help with the transition to English for the Latinx student population. However, for students in programs where an ELL coordinator was not available, an importance was placed on one-on-one discussions with their agriculture teachers about English development. "Toma el tiempo además para explicarlo solo a mi y creo que está muy bien," ("*He takes the time to explain it to me and it is really good.*") replied Rodrigo, a junior taking his first Animal Science class. Latinx ELL students in one program were expected to participate in group projects and speak in front of their peers too, "Yeah we get up there and do presentations, speeches, and if we pronounce something wrong he tells us afterwards. That really helps me." Although it takes additional time and effort for the agriculture teacher, students see the effectiveness of separate office hours, in-depth tutoring, and supplemental translations of class work.

**Theme 4: Build the Culture**

Teachers throughout the study created positive interactions, supported their English development, and built relationships with their ELL students. However, the teachers failed to provide an environment where Latinx ELL students and their White classmates could interact and begin to build a culture of inclusivity. In one high school, the Latinx ELL students started off the semester sitting in desks directly next to the teacher's desk, but as the semester progressed, the ELL students moved the furthest away - toward the back corner of the room, "Yeah we used to be right there where everyone would see us or whatever, but now we sit over there... it's easier." By selecting where they sat, the ELL students were selecting a location where the least amount of people would interact with them because it was "easier" to sit amongst other Spanish-speaking students who were assumed to already be their friends. The researcher team noticed this recurring pattern of Latinx students sitting only with other ELL students in the furthest seats from the teacher's desk at every school as well as in the hallways and common areas, like school cafeterias. Ten minutes into one interview, the agriculture teacher came into the room and began to apologize for the interruption. Beside her was another student qualified to be interviewed. The agriculture teacher had forgotten to send him because "[he] is so quiet and always sits in the back."

A lack of community amongst the class was revealed by the student responses, "Sí casi nos tiene separados de los güeros." ("*Yes, they usually keep us separate from the White students*.") The separation from their White peers is preferred by the students and encouraged by their agriculture teacher. Other students spoke about the separation for group projects in their agriculture classes, "Nunca nos mezcla con otros estudiantes porque no entendemos la idioma y aun nunca nos hablan." ("*He never mixes us with other students because we don't understand the language, and they don't speak to us anyway.*") When teachers fail to provide opportunities for all of their students to interact and engage in the classroom, students end up like Rafael who is described as "only talk[ing] when he has friends around." In other departments on campus, however, the problem of social peer engagement is non-

existent; in fact, these friendships are being made, in spite of the language barrier, just not in the agricultural classes. Three students agreed that it's primarily "The country, really-white, all-they-do-is-farm kids… They never talk to us during lunch. Other Americans do, but those are my friends."

At the schools visited, students felt a disconnect between their agriculture teacher and the school's FFA chapter. Although students spoke highly of their agriculture teacher, students did not share these attitudes about the school's FFA program nor the FFA officers. Although, the finding may appear to be associated with the students, the teacher harnesses the culture of the program and the ELL students did not associate the teacher with the youth organization. None of the students interviewed were currently involved in the FFA program but two students were involved in the past. They left the program to join another, more inclusive club, "I mean I've seen posters, but I would just rather do other stuff, like the Latinx Club ... I'm the Vice President right now and it's cool." The researcher then asked the student if he could see himself taking on the same leadership role in the school's FFA chapter; the student immediately responded, "Oh no… Most of the time it's the country kids that are the officers. All of the time, actually." Students reiterated feelings that they would not be welcomed to the FFA program, "My teacher talks about it in class, but the students haven't tried to get me to join. They've never talked to me." On another campus, Latinx students spoke of the feelings of loneliness they would likely experience if they were to join FFA. The researcher asked the group of students, "Would you be in FFA if asked?"
Carmen hesitates but says, "Puede ser…" / *"I might be…"*
Emilio remarks, "Yo no." / *"Not me."*
Carmen explains, "Da como pena, todos son Americanos y uno es Hispano." / *"It's kind of shameful; everyone is American and one is Hispanic."*
The third student, Crystal, adds to the conversation, "Se siente sola." / *"It feels lonely."*

## Conclusions, Inferences, and Recommendations

The findings were presented using excerpts from the collected data, then discussed further in the context of the selected theoretical framework. The upcoming conclusions are compared to previous, related research findings that are separated first by the culture of the classroom and then in regard to the classroom agriculture teacher. The research team recognizes the limitations of this case study - interviews were conducted with students from high schools where the teacher and school invited the team to talk with their students. Latinx ELL students from other schools and states may share similar stories to that of the participants, particularly in regard to the culture established by their White peers (Elliott & Lambert, 2018); however, the following conclusions and inferences maintain considerations to the borders of the participating schools, and state. Nevertheless, the findings of the study lay a foundation for additional research into what appears to be a lack of attention on the fastest-growing population of students in our classrooms.

In Kentucky alone, the Latinx population has grown 66% between 2007 and 2014, the second-highest growth rate for any state in the US (Stepler & Lopez, 2016). Unfortunately, the public schools are not prepared for the fast-growing population of Latinx youth as they face the process of acculturation, assimilation to a different, more dominant culture. Acculturation for high school students includes the challenges of learning a second language and adjusting to new social norms. For agricultural educators with Latinx ELL students enrolled in their classes, positive social interactions and social acceptance can help immigrant youth deal with these acculturation challenges (Potochnick et al., 2012). Within the four schools, all the participants provided evidence of social acceptance with the agriculture teacher. The students and the teacher were engaged in one-on-one conversations and described acts where the teacher showed compassion. Knowing that each of the teachers replied to the request to participate, it implies that they see a need and desire to help Latinx students. Better understanding of the teachers' stories and utilize their strategies would assist novice teachers in their approach.

It can be easy for Latinx ELL students to self-categorize as "different" and isolate themselves from English-speakers, but it's imperative that agriculture teachers create experiences for their class that encourage Spanish-speakers to reach out and for English-speakers to make an effort too. Using the previously mentioned SIOP model by Echevarria et al. (2006) can be an effective way to incorporate teaching methods that advance the English development of immigrant youth without taking away from the content of the course. An inclusive classroom would encourage group work; vocabulary learning through identification and project-based learning; and explanation and synthesis building.

In all of the cases, the students had experience in agriculture, either from their family heritage or through working with a family member on a farm or warehouse that dealt with agriculture products. Unfortunately, most individuals in the school, primarily their agricultural education colleagues were unaware of the fondness each student had toward agriculture. The participants shed light that due to their lack of English and the clothing that didn't depict an agriculture student, they were assumed to be non-interested in the field. In each of the situations, the agriculture teacher should assist ELL students to make the transition of their agriculture work background to an SAE project. Furthermore, highlighting the ELL students' work on bulletin boards and in class discussions allows White students to see a different perspective of their peers and encourages engagement between the two student groups. With students as passionate about agriculture, involvement in FFA and SAE projects would be obvious for any English-speaker; but because these students are native Spanish-speakers, they were not informed on the opportunities the three-ring model provides. Only three of the 29 students interviewed could articulate what the FFA organization was; only two had ever attended an FFA meeting before; and none of the students considered themselves active in their FFA chapter.

With the knowledge of agriculture that the ELL students possess, it is recommended that the teachers develop a plan for involving Latinx youth in their local FFA chapter by establishing meaningful peer engagement, recruiting Latinx student leaders, and developing a position on the executive leadership team that is maintained by a Latinx student. Not only would teachers see an increase in membership and students' English proficiency, but teachers would begin to create a culture where all students feel welcome to enroll, and participate, in the agricultural education program (Roberts et al., 2009). Teachers and student leaders need to start recruiting those with the most engagement and investment of the agriculture industry, both English and Spanish speakers alike.

Evidence continued to surface that Latinx ELL students had an affinity for their agriculture teachers, yet they felt a disconnect from the rest of the agricultural program, specifically with the traditional, White agriculture students. These findings are consistent with Talbert and Larke's (1995) and Jones and Bowen's (1998) studies that find the main factor influencing minority youth to enroll in, or in this case not enroll in, introductory agriscience courses was the negative interactions with agriculture students. Addressing the culture established in the program begins with the teacher. Within six months from the composition of this manuscript, the research team will meet with the teachers to engage in how to build an inclusive culture. Some strategies being recommended are first identifying the existing culture; creating projects that encourage interracial communication and understanding; and obtainment of financial resources that would advocate participation of Latinx ELL students. Such resources can be made available within the agriculture community. If the teacher desires to be a champion for the Latinx students, they must advocate the students among the student peers, the rest of the school and the overall community. Agricultural education can lead the way in improving English comprehension, addressing racial tensions, and increasing academic achievement of Latinx youth. New, innovative methods of teaching for all students who walk through our classroom doors is essential for not just our student populations but for the future of agricultural education.

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