



Looking into the Institutional Mirror: Ways to Promote Validating Practices and Policies in Education for Latina/o/x Students

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Efforts to serve Latina/o/x students has received continued attention over the last couple of decades. There has been recognition of significant demographic changes, disparities with achievement and attainment outcomes, and equity issues as they relate to language programs and policies, testing, teacher development, and many others. While important, it is also vital to ask additive questions about Latina/o/x students' experiences in education such as, Where are Latina/o/x students thriving? In what ways does excellence emerge in their lives? How can education systems capitalize on such excellence? This presentation will introduce the metaphor of the institutional mirror by exploring the extent to which the institution reflects the identity, culture, knowledge, and experiences of Latina/o/x students. Drawing on various asset-based conceptual frameworks and referencing preliminary data from an in-depth study with Latina/o/x high school students, this presentation will explore how additive frameworks and Latina/o/x excellence can be incorporated into educational policy and practice.

Long before the health pandemic, the presence of pervasive social and educational inequalities have been well documented and disproportionately impact Students of Color, low-income students, English Learners, special education students, and immigrant students. For Latina/o/x students specifically, the effects of testing, cultural erasure in the curriculum, low expectations, tracking, and the absence of representative educators, among others, have all shaped their experiences and outcomes in education. Nonetheless, many scholars have proposed additive frameworks to help shape the way educators, leaders, and policymakers recognize and understand the hope and promise that Latina/o/x student bring to education. The goal of this work is to center Latina/o/x excellence by recognizing its hemispheric roots that centers the history, culture, community, and family as vital facilitators for Latina/o/x student success.

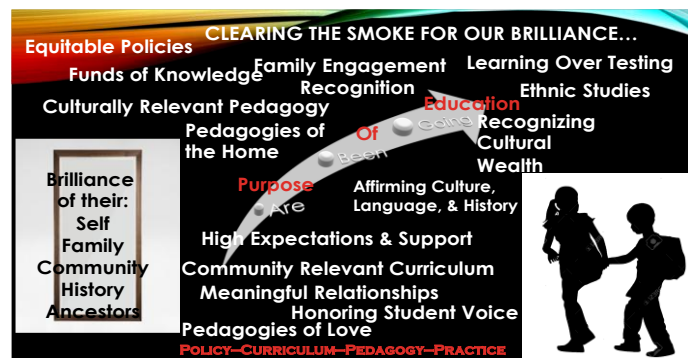
School/Institutional Culture Matters: In my research, student-teacher relationships, student voice, community relevant curriculum, recognizing students holistically, and making learning public are just a handful of ways that schools and educators can prioritize school/institutional culture to shape Latina/o/x student success (see *The Time is Now* book, Rodríguez, 2014.)

Excellence Matters: While the mission on our education system is to develop the academic skills and knowledge of students, I have found that intentionally using excellence as a pedagogical tool to engage communities can serve as a lever that exemplifies local models of excellence and changes the narrative in education. Rather than focusing on failure, a Pedagogy of Excellence focuses on the policies and practices that facilitate Latina/o/x success (see *Intentional Excellence* book, Rodríguez, 2015.)

The Institutional Mirror: Over the last few years, my research has found that excellence is present in the lives of Latina/o/x students in various ways but it may not emerge in their day-to-day schooling experiences. On preliminary basis, we found that Latina/o/x students are more likely to attribute their academic success to members of their community—peers, teachers,

family, community, and ancestors, particularly when they also demonstrate a more critical consciousness of who they are in the world.

This suggests that Latina/o/x students see academic success largely as an community-driven endeavor and students need an opportunity to affirm the excellence they already experience in their social worlds. Thus, the institutional mirror must be used as an intentional tool to engage Latina/o/x student success.



How can we make education more reflective of the students we serve, especially those who serve Latina/o/x students?

Education and social policies should ensure that every educator and leader can demonstrate a commitment to and understanding of equity. Every educator and leader should understand additive frameworks especially when serving Communities of Color, English Learners, immigrants students, and others. Every student should see themselves in the curricular mirror. Every policy should be considered through the experiences of the most marginalized group in your institution. Every assessment effort should not just measure learning but creativity, compassion, and progress. Every Californian should know about excellent teachers, classrooms, and schools and not just a narrative of “we did it,” but this is how we did it.

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