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Dismantling the Dichotomy: Latinx Identity and Assimilation in Early Childhood Education

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Dismantling the Dichotomy:
Latinx Identity and Assimilation in Early Childhood Education
A Thesis
Presented to
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Abstract

An increasing number of children in early childhood education (ECE) are Latinx. Drawing on ethnic identity, culture, and language, this thesis describes the dichotomy between adherences to one's ethnic identity and assimilation into the dominant societal culture. This paper describes how assimilation harms students and provokes negative implications such as identity loss, confusion, and loss of cultural ties. Dismantling the dichotomy is possible through the power of language, culture, and strengthening teacher-parent relationships.

Chapter I.

Introduction

Early childhood is a complex and critical period where children first learn how to navigate the world around them. This early learning experience known as early childhood education (ECE) is where children are first introduced to classrooms and teachers. Each child and their family bring unique cultural characteristics from their home to the classroom, such as languages other than English and family immigration histories. However, these families often struggle to find comfort within ECE programs. Latinx students have strong cultural ties to their family and communities. Success for Latinx students is difficult under programs that fail to include their values, beliefs, and cultural differences. Despite the mainstream efforts to modernize classrooms, many Early Childhood Programs lack the foundational knowledge to support children from diverse backgrounds. Furthermore, "much of the information available to support language and learning is based on mainstream beliefs that may not match the culture of the families from diverse backgrounds" (Cycyk, Hammer, 2018, p. 27). Considering the continuity of the United States' increasingly diverse population, it is imperative to ensure early childhood classrooms are positioned as places where cultural differences are enriched.

The Latinx population is one of the fastest growing ethnic-racial minority groups in the Unites States. The term Latinx is a gender-neutral or non-binary term used to describe people of Latin American origin or descent (Bustamante, 2021). More than 1 in 4 newborns in 2018 were born Latinx (Krogstead, 2019). Furthermore, the 2020 census revealed that the Latino population was 62.1 million in 2020, which grew 23 percent since 2010 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020). Latinx culture represents a variety of countries. While Latinx people cannot be regarded as a

homogenous group, this thesis will focus on the similar experiences faced by Latinx families as they interact with ECE.

For definitional purposes, there are a few terms this paper will explore. While the term culture has many definitions, this paper will explore culture as "a community's values, beliefs, and behaviors as well as its language, customs, and definitions" (Saracho & Hancock, 1983, p.43). Third, Ethnic Racial Identity (ERI) defined as "an individual's working understanding of the behaviors, characteristics, values, and customs that are relevant to their ethnic-racial group" (Williams et al., 2020, p. 23) will be explored as a way to discuss this term in the context of Early Childhood Education. Fourth, the term dichotomy will be discussed in the context of assimilation or an individual's ability to uphold their culture and identity.

It is crucial to empower future educators with knowledge that prepares them to receive students from diverse cultural backgrounds. Therefore, the goal of this paper is to explore the dichotomy between ethnic identity and assimilation into the ECE classrooms. In doing so, this paper will address the following questions:

1. Does the dichotomy between adherence to one's ethnic identity and assimilating to the dominant societal culture harm students? If so, how?

2. How do early childhood teachers dismantle this dichotomy in the classroom through language, culture, and teacher-parent relationships?

Lastly, this thesis will outline practices that can be implemented in the classroom to strengthen the cultural foundation of students in early childhood classrooms.

Chapter II.

Review of Existing Literature

To understand the dichotomy between ethnic identity and assimilation, it is imperative to review the existing literature. This literature review will focus on the subtopics that intertwine with ethnic identity and assimilation. The first section of this chapter will focus on bilingualism and the perceptions of linguistic diversity. Ethnic identity consists of language. Thus, understanding the perception of bilingualism is imperative. Second, this chapter will examine the concept of ethnic-racial identity to better understand its development in children. Next, the third section of this chapter will uncover Latinx values to analyze how they differ from those of the dominant culture. Lastly, the last section of this chapter consists of socialization and friendships. Social relationships are such a critical component of education. Understanding the experiences of Latinx students and how their identity affects their socialization is crucial.

1. Bilingualism& Linguistic Diversity Perceptions

Early bilingualism is the acquisition and development of two languages in a child's preschool years (Rodriguez, 2015). Latinx students tend to learn Spanish as their first language. Existing research reveals that there are many advantages to being bilingual. These advantages include cognitive flexibility and metalinguistic awareness. Executive functioning skills, specifically in the areas of inhibitory control, cognitive flexibility, and working memory have also been proven to improve (Genesee,2008; Lauchland, Parisi, &Fadda, 2012).

An existing research study sought to uncover the influence of bilingualism on the development of high-order cognitive functions (Leikin, 2012). This study is a response to previous research and consensus that focused on the negative influence of bilingualism on

children's mental and cognitive development. Leikin (2012) explained that previous research was conducted through a deficit lens and contradict modern research surrounding bilingualism.

Leikin's study aimed to push a consensus regarding the positive impacts of bilingualism. These positive impacts include cognitive, linguistic, and academic growth. Leikin (2012) sought to change the way bilingualism is viewed and remind readers of the advantages in development that bilingual children possess in comparison to monolingual children. The article discussed a theoretical background regarding bilingualism and cognitive development. This review focused on sharing the positive effects of being bilingual on cognitive development. Some of these include general creativity and flexibility. These are some of the cognitive advantages that children who are bilingual possess that monolingual children do not.

Furthermore, native bilingual children performed significantly better on executive function. This is also a benefit that is unique to bilingual children. The results of the study revealed that early bilingualism and bilingual education influence a child's general and mathematical creativity (Leikin, 2012). In this research study, bilingual children tested higher for creativity, fluency, originality, and flexibility. There were notable differences between bilingual and monolingual children. Several studies on the positive impacts of bilingualism have revealed similar findings (Poulin-Dubois et al., 2010, Carlson & Meltzoff, 2008).

While the benefits of Bilingualism are astonishing, for some Latinx families, being bilingual is more than these advantages. It is the ability to remain rooted in their culture. There are many perceptions of bilingualism that early childhood educators must take into consideration as they approach linguistic diversity. Existing research has uncovered how narratives of language ideologies drive the narratives of biliteracy (Kabuto, 2017). The article explores how narratives are often used to define biliteracy. Two women and their families participated in a large

empirical study that composed of seven different families. These case studies focused on the transgenerational nature of literary practices in the home. Both were from low socio-economic households. The data was collected in ten different one-hour sessions. The children and their families were asked to read a variety of texts and engaged in reflections of oral readings. Both the families and the children were asked to read in their home language as well as English. The parents were also asked to sit in interviews that targeted their child's progress in school. Kabuto (2017) observed how families discussed progress in their homes.

The findings of this research study suggest that language-driven ideologies are based on how families discuss the positive and negative effects that being bilingual has on their children. Therefore, the narratives parents construct because of their child's progress in school directly affect how they view the phenomena. This research can be applied to how others may feel about bilingualism. A family's thoughts of bilingualism are shaped by the surrounding narratives. If the surrounding narratives are positive, then they may mirror the positivity (Kabuto, 2017). Contributing narratives include ones that incorporate input from teachers. Additionally, academic performance in the classroom also contributes to the narratives. Thus, parents are more likely to have a better sentiment towards their bilingualism if they feel their child is supported in school and has the resources to succeed. Additionally, educators can advocate for stronger bilingual programs to enhance perceptions of bilingualism in their school.

Linguistic diversity should be considered a resource. In a research study aimed to dismantle misconceptions surrounding linguistic-diversity in the United States, Souto-Manning (2006) explained, despite the diversity of classrooms in the United States, there are still multiple individuals that believe misconceptions when it comes to linguistic diversity (Souto-Manning, 2006). Some of these misconceptions create confusion in families regarding the linguistic

development of their children. For the research study, weekly conversations of mothers and young children were recorded in play settings. The research consisted of observational data collection and interviews. Souto-Manning listened in on conversations happening in the play setting. Part of the data collection included a few informal interviews. The results of the study revealed that at first, the mothers were hesitant about linguistic diversity. They viewed bilingualism as something that could confuse their child and potentially distract them from doing well academically. However, after witnessing a bilingual child speak in more than one language, they were intrigued and wanted to learn more about how their child can also become bilingual. Therefore, the research revealed that once the families witness some of the benefits, the misconceptions surrounding linguistic diversity would be dismantled. Considering the benefits of bilingualism, nurturing another language in the classroom is proven to benefit all students. Additionally, when educators promote positive narratives surrounding bilingualism, families are more receptive to understanding the benefits of linguistic diversity. Furthermore, it is also a way for bilingual students to feel more rooted in their culture and for non-bilingual students/families to experience linguistic diversity.

Strategies on teaching bilingual children is a crucial component of bilingual research. More than 12 million children hear a minority language at home from birth in the United States (Florida Atlantic University, 2021). Considering the number of children that are bilingual, it is imperative to incorporate research on teaching bilingual children. A previous study sought to identify recommendations for communicating with English learners and encouraging English Learners to become full participants in the classroom (Gillanders, 2007). Gillanders (2007) sought out specific strategies that revealed how teachers can instruct English Learners. Furthermore, the goal of the research study was to identify how monolingual teachers can

effectively instruct bilingual children. The article also addressed the need for bilingual teachers in the classroom. Gillanders (2007) explained in their research that Latinx children perform lower academically than non-Latinx children. Thus, educators need to ensure they are creating a quality connection with all their students in order to help bridge the gap of academic performance.

The study took place in the state of North Carolina. Gillanders (2007) explained how the Latinx population had a 394% increase since 1990.The study took place in a school with the highest number of Latinx students. Gillanders (2007) observed a classroom as the first part of the research study. She observed the teacher, a monolingual white woman, and the interactions she had with her students which included Latinx children. Formal and informal assessments of the children were taken. The formal assessments focused on vocabulary attainment and the informal assessments focused on the children sharing narratives about their families and identity.

The results focused on strategies to enhance the teacher-student relationship. Part of these strategies included using Spanish in the classroom. It outlined the importance of ensuring teachers relate to bilingual children. Despite the benefits of being bilingual, it is imperative to ensure educators know how to connect with bilingual children, especially if they have a challenging time speaking English. In doing so, the educator will succeed in creating a connection with the student for their emotional health. These strategies demonstrated success in teaching English Learners in a monolingual classroom. Educators must remember the entire gift of bilingualism; this includes creating an environment that promotes education and personal growth for all students.

2. *Ethnic-Racial Identity*

Children often use ethnic-racial identity to organize their social environments (Bennet &Sani, 2003). Ethnic Racial Identity (ERI) is defined as "an individual's working understanding of the behaviors, characteristics, values, and customs that are relevant to their ethnic-racial group" (Williams et al., 2020, p. 23). Ethnic-Racial minority youth develop an awareness and understanding of their background during childhood. Existing research revealed that children begin to be aware of their ethnicity-race and understand themselves and others regarding ethnicity-race from the age of four years old (Ausadle & Feagin, 2001; Bennet & Sani, 2003; Waxman, 2010). Furthermore, an individual's ethnic-racial identity development in early childhood informs their ethnic-racial identity development later in life (Umana-Taylor et al., 2014; Williams et al., 2021).

Williams et al., (2021) studied three adaptive measures of Mexican-heritage children. These adaptive measures are a way the students adjust to new environments. The adaptive measures included the children's attitudes, centrality, and knowledge. The study consisted of 182 Mexican-heritage students. First, in measuring the children's attitudes, the research concluded that there were positive attitudes measured when the children labeled themselves as Mexican (Williams et, al., 2021). Second, the research found that ERI centrality was associated with self-labeling as Mexican. In this developmental period, once children begin to self-label, ethnicity and race become central (Williams et, al., 2021). In fact, existing literature on gender and identity has explained, once children self-label their identity, they develop detail schemas, which affect their feelings about themselves (Martin, 1991). Third, Williams attributed ERI knowledge to ERI centrality in this study. They found that the children's knowledge directly correlated with their centrality regarding their ethnic identity.

Williams et al., (2021) found, when children understand their ethnicity, they have better adaptive behavior at home and at school. Children grounded in their ethnic identity can use it as a protective effect. This can result in more comfort when navigating unfamiliar values, traditions, and expectations. This includes entering new schools, new classrooms, and even new friendships. "Children who felt more secure in their understanding of their ethnicity and especially in its permanence may have been more self-confident and less susceptible to the potential stress of negotiating cultural differences between home and school" (Garcia Coll & Marks, 2009, p.53). Additional studies suggest that a strong identity is associated with better self-esteem (Brody et al., 2006; Romero & Roberts, 2003). A strong self-esteem results in a confident student that is read to learn and grow in the classroom. Thus, it is imperative to understand how ethnic identity promotes positive outcomes in the development and education of young children. In understanding the importance, educators will find value in ensuring they are promoting ways children can foster their identity in the classroom.

3. *Latinx Values*

Like other ethnic and cultural groups, Latinx families typically share important values they hold true to their livelihoods and existence. Latinx families subscribe to a wide range of values and beliefs. These values are especially important as they begin their first interactions with teachers, schools, daycare centers and their child's education. Their first impressions of early childhood classrooms and teachers will follow them throughout their child's educational journey.

Two constructs that encompass several of these values and beliefs are *Familismo* and *Educación* (Cycyk, Hammer, 2020). *Familismo* translated as familism in English, is described as honoring, prioritizing, and contributing to their family unit. Latinx children and their families place special importance on *Familismo* and emphasize it through displays of behavior and

attitude that emphasize commitment to the family (Calzada et.al. 2014, Valdes, 1997). In early childhood education, this can be demonstrated when older siblings are involved in their younger sibling's education. Considering some Latinx families may not speak the English language, older siblings are often the bridge of communication between teachers are parents. Older siblings can also oversee pick up, drop off, and even parent-teacher conferences. In a study that measured perceptions of familial involvement in Hispanic households, Johnson et al. (2017) unveiled how Latinx mothers often view language as a barrier of involvement in their child's education. English is often regarded as a barrier to feeling secure about their parenting. Thus, non-English speaking mothers may seek help from English speaking family members in order to communicate with their child's educators (Johnson, et.al, 2017).

Furthermore, family and education are both equally important to Latinx families. Educación, translated as education in the English language, is the value placed on supporting children to obtain behavior and moral guidance, which includes contributing to the family unit. The aforementioned study concluded a common belief among mothers, they emphasized a well-rounded education included learning about traditional school subjects such as math and literacy, but also morality (Johnson, et.al, 2017). The values of education that Latinx parents place on their children include a formal education as well as a cultural education which intertwines with their role as a child in their Latinx household.

As a result of these values, there are multiple cultural differences Latinx families endure when interacting with early childhood education programs. This can create uncertainty among Latinx families, ECE programs, and teachers. Early childhood teachers may interpret examples of *familismo* and the involvement of their student's older siblings as a lack of interest on the parent's end. However, teachers may not be aware of the family dynamics in the household or

the barriers present. Older siblings are the bridge of communication when Latinx parents do not understand the language or even the school system. As a result of the misinterpretation of family values, Latinx parents may be hesitant to send their child to ECE programs, or their comfortability within the programs may become compromised. Latinx families aspire for their children to be successful but not at the expense of compromising their familial values.

Additionally, another component of Latinx value is the ability to communicate with parents regarding their child's *educación*. A previous research study examined communication between educators and parents who do not speak English as their first language (Cheatham, Ro, 2011). The research sought to identify challenges parents endure when interacting with their child's English-speaking teacher. This study sought to provide a discussion of the complexity of second language listening, an illustrative analysis of difficulties for parents who do not speak English as their first language when communicating with early childhood educators. Cheatham discussed how early childhood programs, K-12, and special education programs face challenges when communicating with parents who do not speak English as a first language. Families are often not offered language interpretation services. As a result, they are left out of critical conversations regarding their child's education. Furthermore, their children will continue to miss services they may desperately need.

The article revealed family and teacher discussion followed by an array of solutions that could be implemented to fill the gaps of communication between teachers and early childhood educators. Some of the recommendations include ensuring that teachers do not dominate the conversation. It is imperative to allow families to share their goals and opinions for their children. Teachers also need to ensure that they are emphasizing and being articulate during conversations (Cheatham, Ro, 2011).

4. Socialization & Friendships

Social relationships are a critical component of education. Cummins (1996) explained that relationships are at the core of schooling. The interactions students experience with teachers and other students are just as critical to their success as other subjects such as literacy, math, or science (Cummins, 1996). Barbara Hruska (2007) conducted an ethnographic, yearlong study on the implications of identity, friendship, and relationships for Bilingual Kindergarteners. The purpose of this study was to identify how the context of an elementary school setting can restrict bilingual children and their access to achieving friendships in English only classrooms. Bilingual children often have unique schedules because they are in English as a second language or transitional bilingual education classes for instruction. Considering that their routine is different from non-bilingual children. The research study focused on uncovering dynamics of disconnect. Hruska sought to find solutions that can be implemented on a local level for bilingual children.

The study focused on six Spanish-dominant students who were enrolled in a Spanish Bilingual program. The group of six consisted of two girls and two boys. Two of the students had newly arrived in the United States and did not speak any English. Three of the students had been here for a few years. The last student was born in the United States. The range of the student's English proficiency ranged from beginner level to an intermediate level. The families of the students were Spanish dominant and spoke Spanish at home. Hruska's research revealed that having friendship in the classroom was associated by status. Hruska (2007) found that children obtained an increased and heightened social status by expanding the number of friends they had. In other words, students who seek out more friends have a bigger sense of confidence because they are continuously sought out by others. Children would also publicly shout out their friends' names in the lunchroom. This demonstrated a public display of who was each other's friends.

Furthermore, the data revealed that bilingual children understood the importance of friendship. However, they were unable to maintain friendships with native English speakers.

Lastly, Hruska noted that some of the friendships were linked to children being able to interact outside of the classroom in at home play dates or events of that nature. These kinds of interactions are not usually an option for bilingual children, considering that their parents often do not speak English. Hruska analyzed how Spanish bilingual children had more difficulty developing friendships with English dominant speakers. While there were multiple factors that contributed to these results, the association of social status and friendships negatively affected bilingual student friendships. Bilingual children obtained little to no status in this setting. Hruska contrasted this finding with existing research were classrooms support multilingualism. In the settings where being multilingual was associated with positive status, multilingual children were able to initiate and maintain friendships with less difficulty.

In this chapter we have reviewed existing literature on the subtopics that intertwine with ethnic identity and assimilation. The main themes that arise from the literature are as follows: bilingualism, the perceptions of linguistic diversity, ethnic-racial identity, Latinx values, socialization, and friendships. First, existing research reveals that there are numerous benefits to being bilingual and the perceptions of linguistic diversity are often created by surrounding narratives. Second, ethnic-racial identity is central to a child's development and is a way they make sense of their social environments. Third, Latinx values hold special importance to familism and a well-rounded education that includes moral guidance and academics. Lastly, understanding the socialization experiences of Latinx students is critical as we discuss ethnic identity and assimilation in the next chapter.

Chapter III.

Analysis of the Research Problem: Addressing Research Question 1

The first research question of this analysis: Does the dichotomy between being true to one's ethnic identity and assimilating to the dominant societal culture harm students? If so, how? Every child's transition into school is unique. There are many factors that make everyone's experience different. Families enroll their children in a daycare center or preschool for differing reasons. The most common reasons include work schedules, an inability to find alternative care, or simply the benefits of early childhood education. Research indicates that "high-quality early care and education (ECE) programs support children's development and can help close racial/ethnic gaps in school readiness, especially for low-income and non-English-speaking children" (Torres-Guzman, et al.,2013, p.111). Nevertheless, there are students who begin their academic journey in kindergarten, having never stepped foot into a classroom prior. For these families, they are interacting with schools, teachers, and formal schooling for the first time. All while processing the drastic and emotional change in their livelihood.

All students undergo a socialization period, regardless of the age they begin school. For Latinx families, this socialization experience can be drastically different in comparison to their non-Latinx classmates. Their identity will often affect their socialization experience. Existing research has often looked to socialization theories to explain the failure of schools to educate ethnic children. In this case, Mexican American children have been explained to "fail" in the classroom because of the styles of language socialization that were drastically different from their experiences at home (Delgado-Gaitan,1990).

The following model and examples from Saracho's (1986) research explained that students function in one of the following levels when encountering socialization at school:

"Level 1 (lowest level): Students become confused when they experience a drastic difference between the two languages and cultures.

Example: A series of charts is used to teach the unit of the family. The father usually is blond, has blue eyes, wears a suit, and holds a black attaché case. Dalia, who does not speak or understand English, sees the chart, and discovers that the family on the chart does not resemble her family, her father has black hair and wears greasy overalls because he is a mechanic. This experience confuses her.

Level 2: Students deny their language and culture, pretending that their language and culture is the same as the school's.

Example: Miguel Jimenez, a Spanish speaking student, changes his name to Michael and may even go a step further and change the pronunciation of his name to "Geemenes."

Level 3: Students adapt to those new or different customs in the culture in which they perceive to have more advanced patterns. Children will assess each language and adapt only the best patterns or customs to make them their own.

Example: Juan Jose enjoys eating food from his culture. He makes it a point to celebrate birthdays and holidays with his family and friends, because he usually gets to eat and has a good time. However, when he is with his English-speaking friends, he refuses to speak his native language and only listens to English-speaking stations on the radio.

Level 4 (highest level): Students are able to make the transition back and forth from one language and culture to another language and culture with ease.

Example: Juanita is a fluent bilingual student. She speaks her native language and the school's language. She carries a conversation in the language that is used in the group. Her behavior is appropriate in different situations or settings such as home, school, or gatherings" (Saracho,1986, p.44).

In 1986, Saracho studied first-day-of school experiences of 6-year-old Mexican children. Her findings revealed the students often felt a sense of alienation among their classmates. "When the students arrived to school on the first day, they typically experienced a cultural shock as a result of being transplanted into a different linguistic and cultural environment" (Saracho,1986, p.45). The students missed their friends, surroundings, and culture. They did not feel a sense of belonging in a classroom that was drastically different from the reality of their lives. Furthermore, some felt the need to alter parts of their identity to not feel a sense of otherization.

Despite Saracho's study taking place in 1986, her findings are not a story of the past. Some education programs still push a false notion that equates success with cultural identity loss. In some classrooms throughout the country, languages other than English, are not welcome. Furthermore, some programs do not have the cultural understanding necessary to work with families and Latinx immigrants. In Adair's (2012) study on discrimination in preschool, findings indicated that the Phoenix teachers were concerned that Latinx children of immigrants were disproportionally sent to special education programs. Educators misread the cultural shock Latinx students faced when transitioning from home to school. If a child enters a state of shock when entering a new classroom, that signals the classroom is not prepared to welcome the student.

In 2006, Maria Souto-Manning began a case study in her Kindergarten classroom. She shared the interactions of meeting her students for the first time. She witnessed Mexican mothers

renaming their children before the first day of school, to avoid association with stereotypes assigned to Mexican students. In this case, a mother changed her son's name from *Idelbrando* to *Tommy* (Souto-Manning, 2007). The incident was shocking. However, the mother explained, she renamed her son as protection from failure. The mother had witnessed her two older sons fight stereotypes that hindered their schooling experience, she did not want the same thing to happen to her youngest son. Souto-Manning described this family as a clear indication of assimilation taking place as the family began adapting to a new school, culture, and language. Changing their name was the first step of this process. Souto-Manning explained how over the years, she saw this practice becoming more frequent. When Latinx culture is viewed through a lens of an assimilationist perspective, they can be explained as resistant to American culture. Speaking Spanish, talking about their home countries, correcting the pronunciation of their name are examples of ways they "resist American culture." These harmless practices are the cause of negative stereotypes that are assigned to Latinx students. Thus, some families prefer to assimilate than to be associated with negative perceptions that can follow their child through their academic journeys. Assimilation is inherently racist because it implies and perpetuates the notion that the other culture is inferior (Elenes, 2003; Freeman, Freeman & Mercuri, 2005).

The alternative of a culturally appropriate and welcoming classroom is one that demands assimilation into the dominant culture. As explained above, common socialization patterns reveal Latinx students feeling pressured to choose between their ethnicity and the dominant culture of the classroom. Saracho (1986) gives an example of this in Level 2 of the socialization model. Students should not be asked to compromise who they are to feel a sense of belonging in a classroom or among friends. The aforementioned research discussed the importance of promoting ethnic identity among children. Past studies suggest that a strong identity is associated

with better self-esteem (Brody et al., 2006; Romero & Roberts, 2003). "Children who felt more secure in their understanding of their ethnicity and especially in its permanence may have been more self-confident and less susceptible to the potential stress of negotiating cultural differences between home and school" (Garcia Coll & Marks, 2009, p.55). In other words, when ethnic identity is promoted, children become less likely to feel pressured into assimilation. However, ethnic identity cannot only be nourished at home. Children spend most of their day in school. They must feel supported in order to continue to feel grounded in their ethnic identity. Early assimilation into the classroom can create long term feelings of low self-esteem, identity loss or confusion, and a loss of cultural ties. Society should not demand children make such a drastic and intense choice at such an early age or any age. One that can create a multitude of negative implications for their future.

In this chapter, we addressed the first research question: Does the dichotomy between adherence to one's ethnic identity and assimilating to the dominant societal culture harm students? If so, how? The dichotomy between adherences to one's ethnic identity and assimilating to the dominant culture does harm students. To reiterate, assimilating into the dominant societal culture creates a multitude of negative implications for children and their families. These implications can be described as identity loss, low self-esteem, and loss of cultural ties. Furthermore, the notion of assimilation is inherently racist as it implies that the dominant culture is superior. Assimilation may begin with something as simple as a name change or when a teacher asks their student to speak English only in the classroom. Educators must be conscious of their participation in the assimilation process.

Chapter IV.

Recommendations: Addressing Research Question 2

The second question of this analysis asks: How do early childhood teachers dismantle this dichotomy in the classroom through language, culture, and teacher-parent relationships? It is imperative to note that simply identifying the problem is not enough. The dichotomy between a student's ethnic identity and assimilation into the dominant culture of the classroom is harmful for Latinx students. Latinx children should not have to make a choice between friendship and belonging vs. their culture and family ties. Villenas (2002) and Baker (2000) described the importance of families reinventing themselves when they enter new communities. It is imperative for Latinx families to envision themselves and their possibilities in new communities without falling into the dichotomy between US or traditional ethnic ways.

Language

For Latinx students, incorporating the Spanish language into classrooms can bolster their confidence. It is imperative to communicate that their home language is valuable. Teachers can incorporate the Spanish language into their classroom to make the language a part of their daily routine. There are numerous recommendations for promoting English and Spanish language development that can incorporated in the classroom and at home. Reading, singing, and acting are great ways for bilingual children to remain rooted in Spanish and English. There is a plethora of books that are designed to help bilingual learners. These books are available at local libraries and can be temporarily borrowed and returned on a bi-weekly basis. For teachers that have funding to purchase books, these books can be found at wholesale markets, or even secondhand stores such as Goodwill. Teachers that are able to purchase books can keep a bilingual library in their classroom where students can read bilingual books and even "check one out" like they

would at their local library. Teachers can use the following ideas to make their classroom library more inclusive.

1. First, Souto-Manning (2016) described the importance of educators committing to creating a library that is multicultural and multilingual. A few ways educators can work towards this productive library include incorporating books that are translated in many languages (ensure you are familiar with the story), bilingual books (for Latinx students Spanish/English books), and a variety of books that reflect the students in the classroom. Be sure to include books authored by people of color.

2. Second, educators can also create an audio library. Families can participate in this library by recording themselves reading books in their home language or languages. This can be available for students on a classroom iPod, tablet, or computer with headphones. Furthermore, this is a wonderful way to expand the students' knowledge of how languages work (Souto-Manning,2016).

Music is also a terrific way to promote bilingualism in the classroom. Music can be used as a tool to acquire language and learn new concepts. Teachers can incorporate songs in the classroom that are in the child's home language as well as English. An example of this is "there are seven days," "Hay Siete Dias." Singing this song in both languages would not only help a child understand the days of the week but will also give them the ability to describe the day in both of their languages. Incorporating this into the classroom does not only benefit Latinx children, but it gives non-Latinx children the opportunity to acquire a second language. This would expose them to the benefits of bilingualism. Furthermore, teachers can also introduce music and art from Latinx countries. There are often opportunities for music during play time. When children play games, such as freeze dance or even hot potato, teachers can play music

from Latinx culture. Mariachi, salsa, cumbia, and mambo are Latinx genres that can be played in the classroom to promote Latinx culture.

Furthermore, there are ways to promote bilingualism on an institutional level. There are efforts that can be made by schools and education programs that can enhance narratives around bilingualism. Educators and parents can support bilingual programs in their school. While there are many different bilingual programs, it is important to note that not all are equally effective. A few programs include transitional bilingual education (TBE), dual language immersion (DLI), and two-way immersion programs (TWI). First, transitional bilingual education is a program that eventually phases out a student's home language. Transitional Bilingual Programs are in early-exit transitional bilingual settings; the explicit goal is always English language acquisition. There is not any emphasis on retaining the student's home language, but instruction can be given in the home language. DLI programs instruct students to acquire a second language while maintaining and developing their home language. TWI programs instruct in both the English language and partner language equally. The overall goal of TWI programs is for students to become bilingual and biliterate. It is important to recognize that TWI and DLI programs are more beneficial for students who are bilingual or are working towards bilingualism. Considering, students are able to maintain and develop their home language while acquiring a second language.

Together, educators and families can advocate for DLI and TWI programs because the overall goal for both programs is to maintain and develop bilingualism. Additionally, educators and families should ensure to display a positive attitude towards bilingualism (Rodriguez, 2015). This includes showing understanding, patience, and respect towards children and families that speak another language than English. An example of this is for an educator to ensure they create written communication in Spanish and English. NAEYC (2015) explained the importance of

displaying positivity towards languages other than English. In doing so, they demonstrate acceptance and respect towards non-English speaking families. Considering, narratives surrounding bilingualism are what shape the perceptions of the language. Thus, families and teachers should ensure to promote positive narratives to reciprocate positive perceptions.

Culture

Educators should promote culture in the classroom as way to (un)otherize Latinx students. Promoting Latinx culture will reduce the reality of a dichotomy. It is imperative for each student to be valued and respected. Educators must acknowledge and respect that each child and their families bring their culture, values, and experiences to the classroom (Torres-Guzman, 2004). The diversity each child brings to a classroom should be viewed as "additional possibilities" vs. "additional challenges."

There are strategies for teachers and classroom modifications that can be promoted to make centers and schools more inclusive for Latinx families. Initially, teachers must educate themselves on the realities of the children in their classrooms. The aforementioned research outlined a cultural shock that is often experienced by students when they enter a new classroom setting. Are educators familiar with the culture of their students? Have they done the proper research to ensure they are not promoting stereotypes? Have they prepared their classroom to welcome students from marginalized communities? If a student is experiencing an intense culture shock when entering the classroom, then the answer is no.

Educators can modify their classrooms to make them more inclusive and culturally aware. Teachers should not wait until Hispanic Heritage month to make their classroom inclusive. The following are strategies early childhood educators can use to promote culture in the classroom.

1. Become familiar with your student's family and culture. Latinx culture represents a variety of cultures. Be sure to check existing conscious or unconscious biases. Let families and children deliver knowledge about their home and culture. Invite family members to share music, dance, and other home traditions (Cycyk, Hammer, 2007). View them as a valid source of knowledge about their identities.

2. Revisit the classroom library and classroom decoration. Ensure there are bilingual and multilingual books available. The library should also include books by Latinx authors. Furthermore, educators should make sure to include a diverse selection of Latinx authors. This includes incorporating minorities within Latinx culture such as Afro-Latinx authors to ensure equal representation. Remove anything that is not representative of the students in the classroom.

3. Examine the dramatic play area of the classroom. The dramatic play center in the classroom is such a rich center because it can be used for all domains of development. Teachers can have materials that reflect a variety of home cultures for children to interact with. Cycyk & Hammer (2020) explained the importance of including items associated with Latinx culture. An example of this could be stocking the play kitchen with foods and brands commonly seen in the children's homes (Cycyk & Hammer, 2020). Furthermore, educators can encourage children to create events in the dramatic play area to relive their favorite familial experiences. For example, children can pretend they are visiting their family's favorite restaurant. What is the name of the restaurant? What is their favorite dish from the restaurant? Why is it their favorite dish? What are the different components of the dish? The children can bring the organic and authentic cultural experiences they experience outside of school to the classroom.

4. Analyze the pictures and posters in your classroom. Are they representative of the students in your classroom? It is important for children to see people themselves represented around the classroom because they can better envision themselves. This can include creating a family wall where children can bring a picture of themselves with their family.

5. Implement Culturally Responsive Teaching. "Using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them" (Gay, 2018). To implement culturally responsive teaching, it is imperative to critique and reject curriculum that does not reflect the students in the classroom. Todd (2021) discussed the importance of analyzing curricula through the lens of student reflection. When educators fail to do this, they intentionally or unintentionally communicate to students that their identity is less valuable and meaningful. Thus, as educators analyze their lesson plan, they must incorporate their students' identities into their planning. An example of this could be promoting a scientist or mathematician of the week, the teacher can be sure to include Latinx scientist and mathematicians that have made wonderful discoveries in the field. Not only does this strategy ensure representation of the students in the classroom, but it gives the students a boost of confidence as they see someone like them make ground-breaking discoveries.

Creating a culturally sensitive classroom can ease the fear of identity loss for Latinx families as they transition into school. As discussed earlier, Latinx families worry their children will be stripped of their identities when they enter the classroom. Furthermore, some mothers decide to change their child's name to avoid stereotypes. By creating a classroom that promotes culture,

families will see it is not their culture vs. their success, it is their Latinx culture contributing towards their success as a student.

Teacher-Parent Relationships

The United States values relationships between parents and educational institutions. This value has been cemented in a nationwide approach to education. Organizations such as the nationwide Parent–Teacher Association, established in 1897, state the importance of parents and educators equally committing to the student's well- rounded education (Kremer, Fatigante,2013). Parental engagement is instrumental to producing positive learning outcomes. Research suggests positive learning experiences occur when teachers work together with parents to create a strong learning foundation for students (Reynolds et al., 2017). Furthermore, some early childhood education programs approach parental involvement as shared ownership. This means an equal responsibility to engage school leaders and families as program owners. In shared ownership, the major partners have an equal responsibility to plan, implement, manage, and improve the program (Reynolds et al., 2017). However, shared ownership is not always possible for families. Thus, educators should adjust their expectations of parental involvement to the family's ability. In other words, if parental involvement for a family result in consistent communication or only being able to attend parent teacher conferences, that should be interpreted as an effort of parental involvement. Considering, not all options for parental or guardian involvement such as volunteering or attending the parent-teacher association meetings are sustainable for families. Socioeconomic, cultural, and language differences are all contributing factors that determine whether a family will be able to continuously engage or whether they have the ability to do so. Consequently, it is imperative that educators provide opportunities and access for parental/guardian involvement. Furthermore, the Latinx community have unique characteristics

that may affect their ability to be involved in their child's education. A few of these characteristics include language differences, work schedules, and an unfamiliarity with the school in general. An educator's expectations of parental/guardian involvement in early childhood education needs to match the family's ability. In fact, expecting involvement in a way that is not feasible for families has the potential to decrease their involvement in school experiences later. The following are ways teachers can build a healthy relationship with their students' parents.

1. Take an ethnographer's approach when interacting with families. In the book *Funds of Knowledge*, (Gonzalez et al., 2005) writes about taking an ethnographer approach when working with families. Teachers must maintain the mindset that everyone is a learner, including themselves. This will create a mindset that enables mutual respectability when working with each other. Gonzalez encourages teachers to ask themselves these questions when working with families. "How do we know about the knowledge they bring without falling into tired stereotypes about diverse cultures? How do we deal with the dynamic processes of the life experiences of students? How can we get away from static categorizations of assumptions about what goes on in households? How can we build relationships of confianza (trust) with students' households? Our answer to these questions focuses on the talk born of ethnography: respectful talk between people who are mutually engaged in a constructive conversation" (Gonzalez, 2005). Additionally, teachers must focus on the family's strengths rather than deficits. This will foster a professional relationship between the teacher and families. A trusting relationship will help Latinx families feel they have a support system in their child's school. In turn, mutual resilience will be fostered in the Latinx community and educators.

2. Provide resources through community mapping. There are recommendations for home, school, and community resources for Latinx families. To begin, teachers can take a community mapping approach to identify what resources and non-profit organizations are nearby to promote learning and healthy development in school and at home. Constructing a community map and placing it in an accessible space (or sending a flyer home with all students) may bring awareness to organizations that promote educational initiatives for the home and school. "Community mapping is a process of discovery and reflection that allows the "mapper" to develop new understandings about a specific geographical area that can assist his or her quest to uncover valuable community resources for children and their families" (Ordonez-Jasis & Myck-Wayne, 2012). Furthermore, community mapping can help identity resources such as food banks, local libraries, and organizations that support undocumented families. It can also help identify public transportation routes for families requiring assistance. Creating a community map where the lens focuses on an undocumented family will demonstrate the center's dedication to working with their families as well as create mutual trust.

3. Invite the families to be active participants in the classroom. Keep an invitation open for them to read to the class in the language most comfortable for them. Understand that a parent's attendance may not always be possible. Considering the value of *familismo* among Latinx families. Grandparents and older siblings may be the ones attending open house night and even parent-teacher conferences. Do not interpret a parent's lack of attendance as a lack of effort.

4. Offer flexibility in scheduling communication with parents (Zarate, 2007). The parents of students may only be available for a phone call during non-traditional teaching working hours, such as 6pm-9pm.

5. Be sure to communicate with families in the language they are most comfortable in (Puente-Hernandez, 2009). Be prepared to have any notes or flyers translated into the language that is most comfortable for the parent, in order to ensure they can understand the communication.

Students form their first experiences and relationships with their early childhood educators; experiences that follow them throughout the rest of their academic endeavors. The same needs to be said for parents/guardians. They are having their first interactions with their child's educational institutions in early childhood. Negative interactions with schools and teachers can leaves Latinx parents feeling discouraged to engage with the school and teachers. At the same time, due to this demotivation, they may be perceived by educators as not interested in participating in their children's education (Brandy et al., 2017). It is crucial that early childhood educators work to ensure these experiences are positive. Encouraging these practices early on, in early childhood education, can establish a strong habitual and attitudinal foundation that will have positive educational experiences in the future.

In this chapter, we addressed the second research question: How do early childhood teachers dismantle this dichotomy in the classroom through language, culture, and teacher-parent relationships? The content of this chapter shared a plethora of ways to dismantle the dichotomy of adherences to one's ethnicity and assimilation in the classroom. In the first section, we discussed the power of language. Advocating for effective bilingual programs such as TWI and DLI programs are crucial at an institutional level. On a personal level, educators can incorporate

language through transforming their classroom libraries. In the second section, the importance of incorporating culture was described as a tool to empower Latinx students. A few ways of achieving this included: incorporating diverse music, analyzing the classroom to make it reflective of the students, and transforming the classroom stations such as the dramatic play area to incorporate items associated with Latinx culture. In the third section, parent-teacher relationships were discussed on a feasible level. It is imperative for educators to adjust their expectations of parental involvement to a realistic level. In analyzing their expectations of families, educators set both themselves and families up for success. By incorporating these solutions in the classroom, educators will dismantle the existence of a dichotomy between ethnicity and assimilation.

Chapter V.

Conclusion

This thesis addressed how the dichotomy between adherence to one's ethnicity and assimilation into the dominant societal culture is harmful for students. As discussed in chapter three, assimilation into the dominant societal culture creates a multitude of negative implications for children and their families. These implications can be described as identity loss, low self-esteem, and loss of cultural ties. Furthermore, assimilation perpetuates the racist ideology that the Latinx culture is an inferior one. Expecting a child to surrender a part of their identity in exchange for acceptance must no longer be tolerated in the classrooms.

Presently, educators have access to an influx of knowledge on the internet and library. In chapter four, we outlined a plethora of ways teachers can create a culturally aware classroom where they can implement culturally responsive teaching. The main tools to achieve this include incorporating the power of language, culture, and strengthening teacher-parent relationships. There are an abundance of recommendations and resources for teachers. Educators cannot continue to implement traditional curriculum and pedagogy while ignoring the changing demographics in front of them. They must stop and ask themselves, who are they truly empowering? What are they truly communicating to children by failing to implement culturally responsive teaching?

It is imperative to continue finding ways to improve early childhood education. There are a few opportunities for future researchers to focus on, with the goal of improving the academic journey of Latinx students. The first would be for future researchers to focus on the impact of parental-involvement for Latinx students. Second, research on the impact of minority teachers on

minority students would be a great study with the goal of implementing culturally responsive teaching.

If teachers genuinely want to create a quality classroom that enhances the education in the class, then they need to implement curriculum and a classroom culture that is reflective of the students sitting in front of them. This paper has discussed the importance of remaining rooted in Latinx identity. Recommendations for educators in approaching the classroom and parents have been discussed with the goal of dismantling the existence of a dichotomy. Educators must position themselves as students and learn from the students in their classroom. In doing so, they will ensure that every child is valued and proud of their ethnic identity.

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