

Chapter 5

Leveraging Latino Teacher Identity as Culturally Sustaining Practice With Latinx English Learners

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ABSTRACT

With the number of minoritized K-12 students increasing, the teaching population does not reflect that diversity. There is evidence that minoritized teachers' identities positively influence minoritized students' academic achievement. However, research is needed to understand how minoritized teachers mobilize identity “sources” to benefit their students. This chapter explores a bilingual, Latina, ESL teacher’s use of

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narrativized identity to provide counter-discourses for ELs. The findings contribute to minoritized and Latino teacher identity research and enriches the discussion of how teachers can use funds of identity as powerful pedagogical tools in the classroom to (re)negotiate negative narratives about immigrant students. This discussion can inform policies for effective recruitment and retention of minoritized teachers while also addressing the need for exploration of teacher identity and racial and ethnic identity in teacher education programs and professional development.

INTRODUCTION

Mrs. Benitez earned a bachelor's degree in Bilingual-Bicultural Education from a state university and was certified to teach both in bilingual and English as a second language (ESL) programs. Her Facebook profile proudly identifies her as a "1st generation American. 1st generation high school & college graduate ...". This virtual declaration is symbolic of her daily and public use of her identity and positionality as a U.S. born daughter of Latino immigrants. This gesture serves as a continuous act of "un-masking" (Colomer, 2018) by embracing often stigmatized ethnic and social markers to promote a positive and transformational narrative about Latinos and immigrant communities and students. Speaking about Mrs. Benitez, a colleague remarked:

She is very involved in the community with the Hispanic community, she is not ashamed of who she is, she holds her identity strongly when it comes to her language and the way she connects with students and peers.

Having taught in the district for over two decades, Mrs. Benitez earned the reputation of being a successful Bilingual and ESL teacher. In the initial stages of her career, she taught in an elementary and middle school's Transitional Bilingual Education Spanish-English program. Most recently, Mrs. Benitez's passion for preparing English Learners (ELs) for academic success in high school and college preparation led her to transition to teaching 7th and 8th grade ELs. With the help of a coworker, she created an afterschool program dedicated to this mission. Her efforts and other contributions resulted in her being recognized by community members and colleagues as impacting the academic success of ELs in her school and community.

Reframing the K-12 Teacher Crisis

As the number of minoritized students, particularly Hispanic students in U.S. schools has increased, the teaching population has remained predominantly White, female, monolingual, and middle class (Amatea et al., 2012; Schaeffer, 2021; Will, 2020). While the percentage of White and Black students decreased from 52%

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