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Cultivating Contextual Attributes in the Integration of Latin@ Educational Leadership

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“We need to help students and parents cherish and preserve the ethnic and cultural diversity that nourishes and strengthens this community – and this nation.” César Chávez

In the United States, where minoritized populations still face challenges and barriers, Latin@ educational leaders have a great opportunity to create social change and constructively transform their environment. Hispanics or Latin@s, the largest ethnic minoritized group in the United States (US), is expected to steadily and rapidly increase in the next few decades (Ennis, Rios-Vargas & Albert, 2011). Based upon U.S. Census Bureau data, it is estimated that the Hispanic population will continue to grow and represent about one-third of the United States population by the year 2050 (2012). With this stable social representation, educational leaders can enhance the educational journey of current and future Latin@ students.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau website (n.d.), the Office of Budget and Management (OMB) “requires federal agencies to use a minimum of two ethnicities in collecting and reporting data: Hispanic or Latino and Not Hispanic or Latino.” The OMB (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.) defines a Hispanic or Latino individual “as a person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin regardless of race” for statistical purposes. Latin@¹, a term

avored by theorist, refers to a person of Spanish-speaking descent who self-identifies as being of Hispanic origin (Valdés, 1997) and envelops the packed unity of Latin@ diverse communities (Espino, Leal, & Meier, 2008). In addition, this preferred term integrates sociocultural associations with place of birth and/or masculine and feminine gender preferences (Obiakor & Martinez, 2016).

With such a rapid demographic change in neighborhoods across the United States, identifying mechanisms for increasing leadership roles among Latin@s to address social and educational needs are essential (Guajardo, 2009). Although demographic changes create a more diverse society, research notes a lack of leadership and administrative roles among faculty and staff of color in higher education (León & Nevarez, 2007; Rodriguez, Martinez, & Valle, 2016). Issues in the educational system, combined with unequal resource allocation, affect Latin@s’ potential for success in the school system (Rodriguez, 2007). Similarly, scarce literature examines the experience, challenges, and contributions of Latin@ educational leaders (Guajardo, 2009). The marginalization of Latin@s in educational leadership positions limits potential contributions to the field of education, community involvement, and role models for students.

Educational leaders of color bring unique and valuable perspectives to strategic positions for addressing the needs and embracing the strengths of minoritized students (Santamaria, 2014). Leaders from minoritized groups in the United States, such as Latin@s, can use their own marginalized educational experiences to improve the understanding of social issues and create alternative practices for educational leaders (Santamaria & Santamaria, 2012). Only through the

¹The term Latin@ acknowledges varied cultural, linguistic, nationalistic identities of people within the U.S. who are often labeled Hispanic for statistics purposes but do not have the same social experiences and legacies associated with Latin@s.

development of responsive instructional practices with a cultural Latin@ focus can educational leaders improve Latin@ students' academic achievement and engagement (Marzano, 2003; Rodriguez, et al., 2016). In this critical piece, the educational experience and identity development of Latin@s as well as educational leadership attributes among Latin@s are explored in the hope of increasing an understanding of Latin@s in the US educational system. It is aimed to contribute to the field by increasing the understanding of the Latin@ social and educational experience in the United States and by discussing a culturally aware leadership approach to improve the educational journey of minoritized students.

The Development of an Identity

Although Latin@s may share aspects of a common culture, they remain a heterogeneous group (Romero, 2005). The expectation of a standardized Latin@/Hispanic identity comes from a social demand to simplify the challenges and barriers faced by the different Latin@ subgroups. However, a respectful model for educational leadership acknowledges and embraces different Latin@ communities to create social change for this diverse minoritized group. Although all Latin@s share a connection to Latin America or Spain; each Latin@ sub-group has different stories, cultures, political views, and needs to be shared and incorporated into the educational system (Ferdman & Gallegos, 2001).

In developing an identity, different social and personal factors influence the journey of Latin@s. The social identity approach explains important parts of the development of self-concept—how an individual sees him-/herself as part of a group, perceives

group status differences, and evaluates these status differences (Tajfel, 1981). Group members of an in-group pinpoint negative aspect of an out-group helping to enhance their self-image based on a normal cognitive process (Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 2002). This approach helps to understand individual perspectives, intergroup relations, and group structure among Latin@s. For instance, Latin@s may identify positive attributes about self to create differences between groups and find similarities in the in-group.

Latin@s experience an ethnic identity development process through a combination of personal experiences and external interactions with the environment that results in an understanding of in-groups and a sense of belonging to an ethnic group (Phinney & Ong, 2007). The concept of racial self-identity combines how others define one's race and how a person has constructed his or her own racial identity partially in reaction to others' responses (Mickelson, 2003). While an individual's ethnicity involves culture, beliefs and values of one's heritage (Phinney, 1995). Understanding the self and the impact of others in the construction of self, while working with resistance and support experienced, can become valuable knowledge for Latin@s leaders (Zavala, 2007) and educational institutions.

Models of Ethnic Identity Development

The model of ethnic identity development by Phinney (1995) describes an ethnic identity process that can be applied to all ethnic groups. There are two basic conflicts as a result of belonging to a nondominant group: stereotyping and prejudicial treatment representing a threat to self-concept and the clash of value systems (Chavez & Guido-DiBrito, 1999).

Individuals also experience three different stages: unexamined ethnic identity, ethnic

identity search, and ethnic identity achievement (Phinney, 1995). In the first stage, the person may lack knowledge of the existence of ethnicity until that person encounters cause to become aware of ethnicity in the second stage. Finally, the individual appreciates other ethnicities and becomes comfortable with having a bicultural identity in the third stage. With this model, Latin@s need to have a cause to become aware of their ethnicity status before they can positively embrace their biculturalism.

According to the minority identity development model, members of minoritized groups experience a social force of oppression that generates attitudes and behaviors as a part of self-concept and group membership (Atkinson, Morten, & Sue, 1993). This model assumes that minoritized individuals develop personal mechanisms to integrate or resist societal views consistent with their internal struggle because of oppression. There are five stages in this model: conformity, dissonance, resistance, introspective, and synergistic (Atkinson et al., 1993). In the conformity stage, the individual prefers the dominant culture, values the life-style of the dominant group and embraces main culture's beliefs while the dissonance stage brings mixed feelings of shame and pride, unconformity with the dominant culture and conflict (Atkinson et al., 1993). A Latin@, who was ashamed of their culture, may interact with a Latin@ who is proud of their roots leading to a move from stage one to two.

In the third stage, resistance and immersion, the person values own cultural values, resists oppression, and develops a strong sense of appreciation before stage four or introspection where the person becomes more comfortable with their own identity and see values in dominant culture (Atkinson et al., 1993). In the third stage, a Latin@ refuses to feel ashamed of being

bilingual, for instance, and starts to discover their own history while in the fourth stage the person identifies positive attributes in the majority culture. Finally, in the synergistic stage the person creates a sense of fulfillment, resolves discomfort, and appreciates other groups. In this final stage, Latin@s feel comfortable with cultural views of family, celebration, and traditions.

These two models—ethnic identity development and minority identity development—offer ways to understand the interaction of oppressing forces, social interactions, and system dynamics in the development of Latin@ individuals. At the same time, racial self-identity can help to evaluate the impact of social construct on Latin@ leaders' creation of self and its interaction with the environment. Understanding the impact of external and internal factors in the construction of self can facilitate the development of a culturally sensitive leadership style that embraces the unique characteristics of the Latin@ culture.

Characteristics of the Community Experience of Latin@s

Understanding the impact of poverty, language, positions of power, and culture on Latin@ students' success in education is a must for educational leaders (Roberts & Hernandez, 2012), especially when Latin@ students have higher dropout rates, are less likely to graduate from high school (Llagas & Snyder, 2003), and less likely to earn a bachelor's degree (Gonzalez & Hilmer, 2006) than other ethnic groups.

When compared to other socio-ethnic groups, Latin@s tend to have lower socioeconomic status (SES) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). Previous studies have demonstrated that SES is the strongest predictor of student achievement (Rumberger & Palardy, 2005). Socioeconomic status affects other

education-related factors such as transportation, availability of resources, learning opportunities, and social interactions (Marzano, 2003). Likewise, proficiency in English (Bets, Zau, & Rice, 2003), and language pronunciation (i.e. accent) appear to affect academic success (Rolon, 2003) because teachers often view these students as less capable of mastering different subjects. Latin@ students, immigrant or not, also experience stigmas associated with being an immigrant due to these factors (Violand-Sanchez, 2006). These personal experiences in the education system represent influential forces that modify the views of future leaders in a Latin@ community.

Some common themes in the Latin@ culture are the value of the family structure, a sense of community, respect, and communication. In a survey, Latin@s expressed more emphasis on family and community than on the individual (Ramirez, 2005). In the Latin@ cultures, *familismo* implies a commitment to the family unit where others' needs come before the needs of the individual (Sanchez, 2009). Similarly, collectivism is a cultural value that emphasizes group benefits over individual rewards or recognition (Hill & Torres, 2010). Respect, obedience, and power are associated with professional positions, educational levels, and age in Latin@ cultures leading students to recognize teachers and administrators as the individuals in charge (Valladares, 2003). This respect for authority also frequently discourages challenges or questions that indicate disrespect (Smith, Stern & Shatrova, 2008). Therefore, educational leaders need to establish institutional programs and systems that embrace these cultural factors as they impact Latin@ students' success or failure in education.

Experiences in early education, combined with a sense of community, can foster future

Latin@ leaders to become forces for change. In a phenomenological study, Mexican American principals shared their challenges, motivators, and experiences at the educational executive level (Dominguez, 2005). These Latin@ leaders identified specific useful conditions and strategies for achieving positions of leadership, overcoming socioeconomic challenges, and integrating diversity into leadership ranks. Through open dialogue with these educational leaders, Dominguez (2005) explained that having memorable and positive experiences in early school, as well as, a shared vision of education as a key to improved socioeconomic conditions influenced Latin@ leaders to continue their college education. In addition, parental views on education and work ethics combined with the presence of a mentor, accessible support structures, and the involvement in school activities maintained their desire to reach leadership roles. Furthermore, these leaders explained that at various point they had to negate their Latin@ background including their names, bilingual abilities, and origin. In some situations, these leaders described how their physical appearance and cultural demeanor, based upon stereotypes, acted as barriers to their potential success. Therefore, educational leaders need to evaluate the role of cultural traits and social forces in the development of self-concept and identity for each individual.

Education Circumstance and Environment

Historically, education has been a successful path for upward mobility in the United States; however, Latin@s are reported to have lower levels of earnings among ethnic groups due to lower levels of educational attainment (Antecol & Bedard, 2004). In the education system, Latin@ students face many obstacles from preschool

through college (León & Navarez, 2007). Specifically, some of these challenges include low quality schools with few rigorous academic courses, low high school graduation rate, less effective college preparation options, failure to transfer to four-year universities from community colleges, low college graduation rates, and reduced presence in graduate school. These disparities provide an opportunity for Latin@ leaders to use their unique perspectives, professional experiences, cultural backgrounds and identities to contribute to the education system (Méndez-Morse, Murakami, Byrne Jiménez, & Hernandez, 2015). Educational leaders need to understand the experience of Latin@s in education and society to provide a smooth path for success in education (Franquiz & Del Carmen Salazar, 2004) as they play a role in leadership practice and opportunities.

Educational leaders need to focus on and celebrate the strengths and unique characteristics, identities, and cultures of students rather than subscribe to deficit models (Chamberlain, 2005; Skrla & Scheurich, 2003). Deficit models focus on limitations and lack of resources among students and are often based on stereotypes with small evidence thereby increasing the divide between community members and school (Hyland, 2009) creating racism within systems affecting practice and policy in education (Valencia, 2010). When students of color perform at lower levels than their white peers (McKinsey & Company, 2009), schools replicate societal power differences based on race, class, and gender internalized in structural components of instruction, curriculum, and policy (Esposito & Swain, 2009). Minoritized students, including African American and Latin@s, internalize the negative views and stereotypes about their ethnic group in society as well as the low expectations that others have for them and which,

subsequently, are exhibited in their behaviors (Esposito & Swain, 2009). The negative environmental feedback affects students' education by instilling low expectations and views of self. The Latin@ identity, as part of the self, with the integration of social and community experiences are important characteristics in understanding Latin@ students' development and participation in school.

Incorporating cultural, linguistic, and experiential differences into the learning process can create an equal path for success among all students, including Latin@s (Nieto, 2009). One of the most comprehensive attempts to address these differences in learning has been the movement to provide multicultural education in schools (Wilson, 2012). Students are exposed to the characteristics of diverse groups based upon race, ethnicity, gender, age, sexual orientation, social class, and ability for the purpose of increasing understanding, respect, and tolerance for differences. Unfortunately, such an approach is superficial and frequently evolves into an overly simplified, stereotypical description of other cultures rather than an in-depth examination and utilization of the ways that these differences impact individuals and educational processes. Integrating culture in the school settings, fostering positive ethnic identity, expressing personal experiences, and empowering Latin@ students via school and community leadership opportunities have been found to maximize student's educational achievements and completion (Violand-Sanchez & Hainer-Violand, 2006). Therefore, a comprehensive approach may be needed to address the needs of Latin@ students in all levels of the educational system.

Educational Leadership

In an education environment with constant variations of challenges and demands, educational leaders may need to embrace more flexible approaches than traditional models (Clarke, 2016). As the understanding and development of educational leadership have evolved throughout the years, different approaches and concepts have been presented in the field. Educational leadership has been described as comprising individual actors who work in isolation from others and are untouched by the environment (Carroll, Levy, & Richmond, 2008). Moreover, it can also involve learning communities in response to systemic relationships based on the needs and on a common direction for all stakeholders in an educational system (Fullan, 2001). In addition, effective leaders for a learning organization possess specific abilities and skills that emerge from personal characteristics and developmental processes (Berson, Nemanich, Waldam, Galvin, & Keller, 2006).

An effective educational leader possesses an operative set of cognitive abilities for establishing appropriate goals for the school, evaluating alternative options and potential consequences and selecting appropriate solutions (Burlingame, 1987). Sergiovanni explained that leaders use five personal forces—educational, human, symbolic, technical and cultural—to promote professional development, embrace others' social and interpersonal potential, show values related to school, manage a variety of resources and find an identity for the group (1994, 2001). Schnebel (2000) proposes that an individual's background influences their values and decisions as a leader, while Cohen and Mach explain that leaders coexist with organizations and that their goals morph to match organizational needs (1974). Similarly, Kouzes and Posner (2012)

suggest that leaders engage in a self-development process by identifying the leader within and mastering the skills of honesty, forward looking, competency and inspiration. Regardless, these individuals have decision-making roles that guarantee the successes and failures of educational institutions (Alston, 2004).

At the same time, a proactive educational leader creates opportunities for exploration, growing, and learning for all stakeholders through guidance, direction, and management (Ramalho, Garza & Merchant, 2010) while inspiring others to be part of a transformative process that supports a shared vision (Ramirez, 2005). In recognizing the interaction of power and leadership, Bateson described how members of disadvantaged groups used resistance and barriers to reaffirm values and become successful (1989). Effective educational leaders also embrace their environment while managing available resources and individuals. Societal forces can influence the success of Latin@ students in the public-school system but leaders need to recognize and enhance these students' unique values and beliefs (Valdes, 1998). Thus, understanding the unique characteristics of culturally diverse students along with the acknowledgement of the interaction and impact of external community forces can lead to effective social equity change leadership.

A Distinct Latin@ Perspective

Leadership, in general, has been extensively researched and is a subject that most people believe is of significant value. Two of the oldest models of leadership are based upon personality traits and behaviors (Northouse, 2007). In the first instance, leaders are assumed to possess certain leadership traits unaffected by the cultural, political, social, and economical environments (Ramirez, 2005). However, no

definitive set of characteristics has been identified that predicts successful leadership in all settings or in all cultures or environments. A second model suggests that individuals can be taught or trained in specific behaviors or skills such as decision-making or problem-solving (Ramirez, 2005). While these skills are relevant and important, this model also fails to address the cultural and environmental characteristics specific to the education of Latin@ students. The ethnic, racial, cultural, and linguistic characteristics of Latin@s necessitate different practices from traditional leadership styles.

Critical Race Theory (CRT) applied to education is another attempt that has been made to incorporate cultural differences into the educational process (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Proponents of this approach insist on viewing the issues through the perspectives of minoritized individuals and adding their personal perspectives to the discourse regarding cultural, linguistic, and experiential issues in education rather than depending upon the narratives developed by non-minority—narratives that are often based upon deficit models.

In 2012, Santamaria and Santamaria put forth a model for educational leadership that privileges race and gender: applied critical leadership.

Applied critical leadership is the emancipatory practice of choosing to address educational issues and challenges using a race perspective to enact context specific changes in response to power, domination, access, and achievement imbalances resulting in improved academic achievement for learners at every academic level of institutionalized schooling in the U.S. (p. 34)

Subsequently, the authors investigated ways in which Latin@ leaders' identities impacted their leadership decisions and

practices (Santamaria, Santamaria & Dam, 2014) and found that the leaders were successful because of their recognition of and appreciation for their differences rather than in spite of them.

In a study about Latin@ perspectives on leadership, the National Community for Latin@ Leadership, Inc. (NCLL) reported that four general leadership traits are expected among Latin@ leaders: character, competence, compassion, and community servanthood (Ramirez, 2005). Like many other ethnic groups, Latin@s value character and competence in leaders but stress compassion, caring, respect, and community involvement as important qualities. These characteristics are respected, expected, and combined with a collectivistic and people-centered scheme among Latin@ leaders.

Perspective of *Mujeres* Leaders. Latina leaders can uniquely contribute to leadership roles in education infusing experiences and perspectives into roles and decisions. From a societal standpoint, Latinas are often described in terms of superlative femininity and passivity (Canul, 2003) and are perceived as responsible for dual obligations in the household and school (Murakami-Ramalho, 2009). Additionally, expectations for marriage and childbearing, self-sacrifice, caretaking, and passivity are gendered cultural expectation for Latinas affecting their opportunities for promotion in higher education (Villarruel et al., 2009). Gender expectations are relevant for understanding leadership participation in education because gender can be more salient for Latinas than race (Onorato & Musoba, 2015).

Although there is an increased diversity in the student population of schools, Latinas are still underrepresented in academic leadership (Montas-Hunter, 2012). In order to understand the work lives and career paths of Latina school leaders, Mendez-Morse and others analyzed a survey

conducted by the National Latina/o Leadership Project (NLLP) (2015). In this study, Latina educational leaders reported a commitment to improve education for students, inclination for a democratic leadership style, and inclusion of aspects of community cultural wealth (as defined by Yosso, 2005) in their leadership practices. Specifically, these Latinas included language and family support in navigating the academic path in the educational experience of students, a reflection of community cultural wealth. Additionally, Latina leaders described that they used their professional experience and communication skills to bond with students, family, parents, and other community members as well as to support academic success of students. These Latina leaders aimed to create better working conditions and to provide positive role models for improving professional upward mobility for other Latinas.

In a study by Montas-Hunter, Latina leaders identified four core components in their leadership approach: a strong sense of values, support networks, self-awareness, and professional experiences (2012). The eight women leaders studied explained their responsibility to advocate for the community and to present a vocal role model for influencing others. The Latina leaders also described racial and sexist attitudes as challenges in their professional experiences that in turn became motivators for persevering in their leadership capacity. Support networks, including family and mentors, which provided encouragement and advice as well as strong communication and determination, were identified as key to the leadership development among these women. Likewise, Magdaleno (2006) and Gonzalez-Figueroa, and Young (2005) reported that mentors and role models brought benefits, support, and guidance for Latinas interested in pursuing leadership roles. Unfortunately, due to the scarcity of

authentic Latina administrative leaders, many Latinas identify their mother as their primary female role model and mentor (Falk, 2011). In order to increase Latina leader role models in administrative positions, fem/mentoring and networking are strategies that should be actively and intentionally developed and employed.

Latina leaders have developed and utilized a variety of strategies to become successful in their careers. For female superintendents, career mobility was more successful when their ethnic backgrounds match the community's primary ethnic group with similar experiences (Quilantan & Menchaca-Ortiz, 2004). Gonzalez-Figueroa and Young explained that Latina professionals maintained a strong ethnic identity and preferred mentors of similar ethnic backgrounds (2005). In addition, Onorato and Musoba reported that Latina leaders identified racial identity as a motivator for social justice to ameliorate injustices in ethnic communities (2015). Thus, it is imperative to identify strategies and implement ideas that can increase the presence of Latinas in role model and mentoring positions to increase the representation of these women in leadership positions. For Latina leaders networking with other women with similar interests and cultural background help to build a knowledge base, encourages the sharing of ideas, and fosters support of goals and professional development while providing a sense of belonging (Falk, 2011).

Implications: Promotion and Direction

Recognizing and incorporating the culture within which a student functions can facilitate the learning process (Gonzalez & Szecsy, 2002). In fact, instruction that negates Latin@ culture and ethnic identity can be responsible for poor performance in the classroom (Bartolome & Trueba, 2000).

Understanding marginalized educational experiences should increase multicultural practices and alternative perceptions and goals of social justice among educational leaders (Santamaria, 2014). The creation and implementation of consistent institutional efforts and professional development for faculty and staff to meet the needs of the Latin@ community in academia, to embrace cultural preservation of Latin@s experiences in the political and educational area, and to connect Latin@ professional across departments are some best practices that can help to improve the work environment for Latin@s (Estudillo & Flores, 2015).

Another way to improve and transform schools to higher levels of achievement, inclusion, and participation for Latin@ students is leadership preparation programs for culturally aware leaders (Roberts & Hernandez, 2012). The leaders are familiar with the experiences of minoritized college students, culturally knowledgeable and sensitive, and have awareness of the needs and strength of the student population. These programs can prepare leaders with appropriate skills for creating high-achieving institutions through quality and effective leadership that address the needs of Latin@ students. Roberts and Hernandez also recommend that field experiences where students can apply their knowledge of best practices, combined with varied instructional methods (e.g. reduced class seating, online, face-to-face instruction) and a structure that respect candidates' cultural values and strong work ethic, should be included in this training (2012). In addition, curriculum should address Latin@ students' needs, delivery models of bilingual education, and culturally sensitive leadership skills for successful leaders of Latin@ groups. Student engagement activities in college can also help to develop leadership skills among Latin@ students.

For instance, Kodama and Dugan found that being a member of an off-campus organization and participating in leadership programs are positive predictors for leadership self-efficacy among Latin@ students (2013).

Based on the NCLL's extensive research, Ramirez explained that leadership development programs should reflect five specific components in their training (2005). Leadership needs to be viewed as a process that considers the transactions between the leaders and followers: (1) Consequently, these reciprocal relationships influence each individual involved—including leaders and followers—and their mutual agenda; (2) Leaders participate in a group or community context; (3) Leaders organize, mobilize, provide support, inspire others, and achieve mutually held goals and objectives around shared purposes, and visions; (4) Leaders make efforts to create changes that benefit learning communities; and (5) Through a process of combining these four components with an understanding of the unique demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of Latin@s, comprehensive and practical training programs can prepare culturally sensitive leaders that can make an impact in their communities.

In addition, understanding the impact of college preparation and student engagement activities can also help in developing leadership skills among Latin@ students. Using a parallel mixed methods design, Garcia, Huerta, Ramirez and Patron (2017) identified relevant sources of leadership development for Latin@ students. In this study, joining a student organization, specifically a fraternity, was a significant predictor of leadership development in Latin@ college students because it enhanced self-confidence, provided group engagement and shaped a leadership perspective. In addition, the researchers suggested that ethnic student organization was positively

related to leadership development but higher institution must increase the number of ethnic clubs on campuses. Finally, the researchers added that participating in an internship also enhanced leadership capacity of Latin@ students. Based on varied suggestions pointed out in this section, higher education institutions could design, develop and implement student engagement activities and programs to enhance leadership skills among Latin@ students. These practices support cultural values that emphasize collaboration, collectivism, and familismo.

Recommendations

Latin@ educational leaders need to assess and use their unique abilities to address the vast educational and socioeconomic disparity among the various Latin@ subgroups and other ethnic groups (Ramirez, 2005). By addressing diversity challenges, educational leaders can engage in innovative approaches that lead to social and community changes (Guajardo, 2009). In order to foster greater academic success for Latin@ students, educational leaders, who value and acknowledge the significance and impact of culture on learning, must incorporate and acknowledge the contextual, social, political, and cultural forces that shape educational leadership and how these forces create a unique landscape for leaders to influence the educational path of others. When institutional investment recognizes the potential contribution of and establishes clear path for professional and personal development, educational institutions can create educational climates where diverse faculty and students can thrive in their respective roles in academia (Castillo & Estudillo, 2015).

Diverse educational leaders can use their personal experiences to bring different perspectives and relevant knowledge to institutions (Thomas & Ely, 1996) to challenge inadequate practices and to

envision systematic changes. Using personal experiences, cultural sensitive leaders are also more likely to address social justice and educational equity in their leadership approaches. Additionally, diverse perspectives and equity driven leadership roles can create transformative and improved educational outcomes for Latin@ students from pre-kindergarten to college (Santamaria & Santamaria, 2012). Based on their own experiences in education, Latin@ leaders can improve learning opportunities for current and future minority students.

There can be no question that race, ethnicity, and gender impact educational and leadership roles and processes. However, if educators and institutions are to successfully impact and improve educational opportunities for Latin@ students, discussions regarding diversity must encompass more than a cursory examination of basic cultural differences. Extensive investigation of the educational experiences and leadership characteristics of current Latin@ leaders must be performed. Voices that have heretofore been silenced must be sought out and heard—they must be allowed to describe and name their own reality. Recognition of the ways in which cultural characteristics inform and shape development and learning should be acknowledged, heeded, and incorporated into educational systems. Policy research needs to recognize the segregated and underserved experience of Latin@ communities (Rodriguez, et al., 2016) as well as educational research and voices can address social injustices against Latin@s to influence policy (Irizarry & Nieto, 2010). Existing or traditional ways of thinking about education and educational leadership must be challenged and changed and sustainable leadership practices for leaders of color developed to meet the needs of Latin@ students.

In the most immediate future, educational institutions can be more intentional in recruiting, hiring, and retaining Latin@ leaders. Deliberate and thoughtful efforts to incorporate diverse perspectives in professional development, institutional governance, and educational curriculum should increase and become the norm in the education system. Safe and non-judgmental forums open to questioning, exploring, and understanding among colleagues where awareness can be heightened should be encouraged and supported in the community and school levels. In the more distant future, further research to specifically identify and develop a more comprehensive body of knowledge pertaining to the characteristics of Latin@ leadership among administrators, parents, educators, students and community members. These investigations can also explore Latinas educational leaders' perspectives to understand their barriers and contributions to the field.

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