

“It’s all about the *ganas*”: Incorporating a Multicultural Curriculum in Developmental Education

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### **Abstract**

Despite the overrepresentation of students of color in developmental education, there is a lack of research on programs that promote the success and transfer of these students beginning in developmental education, especially Latinx students. Since 2012, the Dream Catchers program in Texas has targeted the recruitment, retention, and completion of Latinx and other historically underrepresented students through a literacy-based program that targets students in developmental education in community colleges. This study draws primarily from interview data gathered from 14 Dream Catchers faculty across the 10 institutions that have participated in the program. Through the lens of a multicultural developmental education curriculum, we investigate how the Dream Catchers program provides intensive, long-term professional development for its faculty in order to prepare them to work in a high-touch, holistic program. This article describes some of the professional development activities faculty undergo, what this multicultural curriculum looks like in practice, and how faculty incorporate cultural understanding of their students into developmental courses.

**“It’s all about the *ganas*”: Incorporating a Multicultural Curriculum in Developmental Education**

The current political climate of the United States has drawn attention to the fact that the Latinx<sup>1</sup> population is growing in its visibility in American life, especially now that this population exceeds 56 million people (United States. Census Bureau, 2016). Despite the growth in this demographic in both K-12 and postsecondary education (Santiago, Taylor, & Calderón Galdeano, 2015), the percentage of Latinx adults in the United States who hold an associate’s degree or higher lags behind all other racial/ethnic groups (Ryan & Bauman, 2016). Latinx students in postsecondary institutions are disproportionately enrolled a 2-year institutions (Santiago et al., 2015).

Solórzano, Acevedo-Gil, and Santos (2013) provided data on Latinx developmental students in the California Community College System and noted troubling findings: the more developmental education courses a Latinx student is assigned to, the less likely they are to persist into a transfer-level course within three years. There is a large amount of research calling attention to the presence and overrepresentation of Latinx students in developmental education (Bahr, 2010; Crisp & Nora, 2010; Crisp, Reyes, & Doran, 2015), but there is a dearth of research on programs and classroom experiences that promote the success of these students who enroll in developmental education (Grubb & Gabriner, 2013). A recent notable exception finds that both advising and pedagogy play an important role in helping Latinx students build skills in English or math, while also promoting persistence and instilling confidence in them (Acevedo-Gil, Santos, Alonso, & Solórzano, 2015). What is also a noteworthy finding of this study is how students felt validated by professors, counselors, and peers who shared their racial/ethnic

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<sup>1</sup> The term “Latinx” is a relatively new term and is used here instead of Latina/o or Hispanic in order to acknowledge gender diversity within this population (Molina, 2016).

background while also feeling invalidated by a developmental education curriculum that students could not personally connect to (Acevedo-Gil et al., 2015).

The purpose of this study is to present data from the Dream Catchers program in Texas, a literacy-focused program that brings a culturally relevant curriculum to developmental classes in community colleges in that state. The Dream Catchers program, (previously known as Texas College Success Program: Crossing Bridges, Catching Dreams), which focuses on the first year experience of at-risk, first time in college students, was brought to Texas by the non-profit organization Catch the Next, Inc., and began in three community colleges in 2012. The program has since provided training to nearly 13 community college campuses across the state, and is working on its efforts to scale up to all community colleges throughout the rest of the state. Currently, the Dream Catchers programs operate on campuses in some of the most populated regions of Texas, including areas that are majority Latinx (Chavez, 2016). In five years, the program has served approximately 1,500 students across the participating colleges, and about 95% of these students at Latinx (Dream Catchers, n.d.).

This study investigated the professional development that faculty members receive in order to teach in the Dream Catchers program and how this program provides a multicultural curriculum to students in developmental education.

To do this, an overview of the program and data drawn from qualitative interviews with faculty who have taught in the program at participating colleges was provided. What is noteworthy about this program is its intentionality in equipping faculty with knowledge and skills in order to implement a curriculum that builds community in and out of the classroom; delivers course content in which students can see themselves; and provides students with mentoring and advising to help them through their first year of community college and beyond.

Rather than reporting on the outcomes of the program to describe its success, this study focused on the program's inputs to better explain how its success is achieved through intensive professional development for faculty who work in community colleges with large Latinx student populations.

### **Literature Review**

It has been noted that the experience of community college teaching, specifically the quality, preparation, and pedagogy of instructors, has been overlooked by research on faculty members (Twombly & Townsend, 2008). Though Grubb et al. (1999), and Grubb and Gabriner (2013) contributed greatly to the literature on developmental education, there is still much to be known about faculty in this setting, particularly in their professional development.

### **Professional Development of Faculty**

Teaching issues are a focal point of professional development because teaching is the hallmark of community colleges' institutional mission, and yet most instructors do not have backgrounds in curriculum and pedagogy (Christensen, 2008; Grubb et al., 1999). Goldrick-Rab (2010) criticized the current state of professional development for community college faculty and stated that they have little incentive to pursue such opportunities because their institutions usually lacked the resources to provide faculty members with ample support for items that might boost teaching, such as curriculum development and technology training. Murray (2002) supported this criticism, maintaining that professional development does little to make lasting changes on teaching and learning. The study also found that few colleges tie their faculty training to their institutional mission; they largely had no clear purpose, and professional development projects did not assess whether they had any sort of long-term impact on practice (Murray, 2002).

As a result, these development opportunities generally come in the form of single training sessions or meetings that do little to promote long-term change. One study organized the nature of faculty questions to curricular changes into stages and described how these stages can inform professional development (Bickerstaff & Cormier, 2014). A key point of this study, by Bickerstaff and Cormier (2014), was that previous literature on professional development left out instructors' learning processes as they responded to reform. Faculty go through their own developmental processes that include asking questions about the nature of the reform, such as the rationale for it and expected outcomes; questions about the implementation process; questions about classroom practice; and questions about student learning, particularly how teaching practices could be refined to better address the needs of students (Bickerstaff & Cormier, 2014).

### **Preparing Faculty to Teach in Developmental Education**

What is surprising about the literature on the training needs of developmental educators is how thin it is, especially empirical studies. Numerous pieces by researchers described characteristics of effective instructors in developmental education such as those who demonstrate a strong commitment to teach these students and those who are willing to undergo specific training for developmental settings (Boylan, 2002; Goldwasser, Martin, & Harris, 2017; Smittle, 2003). Boylan and Saxon (1998) found that the most successful developmental programs in Texas were those who showed a commitment to providing their faculty with professional development opportunities. However, none of these studies ever pointed to specific examples of the type of training or mentoring that most effectively develops faculty talent for teaching developmental students.

Similarly, Stein (2005) argued that more needed to be done to meet the needs of Latinx students in developmental education, but no empirical work has been identified which

specifically addresses how to prepare future and current faculty for working with a specifically Latinx population. Even more broadly, very little work has been done on how to prepare faculty to work with a diverse developmental student body. Perhaps the most useful piece in this area advocated the use of learning communities and collaborative learning techniques, building mentoring components into developmental programs, and teaching students of color to cope with racism (Boylan, Sutton, & Anderson, 2003). Núñez and Elizondo (2013) provided numerous examples of culturally relevant interventions in community colleges that showed promise in boosting the persistence and degree attainment rates of Latinx students through in and out classroom activities. Aside from content knowledge, the programs and practices often cited as most successful for Latinx students are those that bring in elements of their culture (Newman, 2007; Núñez & Elizondo, 2013; Santiago, 2017).

### **The Dream Catchers Model**

The Dream Catchers program is inspired by the award-winning *Puente* Project that developed in California in the 1980s (McGrath & Galaviz, 1996). Part of the uniqueness of Dream Catchers model in Texas is in the incorporation of an Ethnic Studies-based curriculum tailored to the student populations of the colleges. While many of the sites in South Texas focus on Latinx Studies (e.g., Mexican American Literature, Mexican American History), sites in Dallas and Houston have also incorporated African American Studies and Asian American Studies as well as readings that describe immigrants' experiences to reflect their student population. Along with class readings that mirror their students' cultural backgrounds, the model also incorporates an awareness of the challenges of students of color and their families face in pursuit of a college education such as financial aid.

The faculty who teach in this program undergo a minimum year-long professional development that begins the summer before they start teaching Dream Catchers courses. The summer institute is a multi-day training that introduces faculty to the core elements of the model and teaches them about culturally relevant teaching, various hands-on examples of exercises they can use on their campuses, and mentoring from senior Dream Catchers instructors from all the colleges. Similar institutes on more advanced topics are offered during the subsequent fall and spring semesters, and faculty graduate from the Dream Catchers professional development following the spring institute. These institutes are supplemented by monthly webinars that engage faculty and campus leaders on emerging research, relevant policy issues, or new teaching tools that may be useful to them. These webinars also offer the colleges the opportunities to share challenges they are facing on their campuses so they may receive feedback or ideas from the other colleges. Catch the Next, Inc., the non-profit organization that oversees the Dream Catchers program, also encourages faculty to share their experiences through presentations at the webinars, the institutes, and at local, state, and national conferences.

Faculty and advisors typically recruit students to participate in the Dream Catchers program during summer orientation sessions. As a learning community, Dream Catchers students typically enroll in three classes their first semester: a developmental integrated reading and writing (INRW) course, Composition I<sup>2</sup>, and a student success course. Students take their INRW and Composition I courses with the same instructor, and together with the student success course instructor, students participate in a variety of in and out-of-class activities that include

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<sup>2</sup> Some participating campuses offer a semester-long developmental course and Composition I is taken in the student's spring semester. Given the recent passage of House Bill 2322 in Texas in the 2017 legislative session which mandates co-requisites model in developmental education, this accelerated model with the developmental course and Composition I in the same semester will be the new default delivery method of this model.



mentoring, targeted advising, cultural experiences, an event called *Noche de Familia* (Family Night), and visits to four-year university campuses.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study examined the Dream Catchers program through the lens of a multicultural developmental education curricula (Bruch, Jehangir, Jacobs, & Ghere, 2004). The authors offered three characteristics of a multicultural curriculum in developmental education. First, cultural diversity is celebrated. Next, a critical approach to the curriculum promotes thinking about power and privilege in society. While the celebratory approach affirms diversity, the critical approach teaches students to acknowledge difference in society across racial/ethnic, gender, and other lines, and the relationship between difference and power. Last, the multicultural curricula is transformative in that it recognizes that education is a way to impact meaningful change, both for the student and the institution. To this end, “A developmental curricula transformed by the insights of multiculturalism tries to enable developmental students to be full participants in academic institutions” (Bruch et al., 2004, p. 14). This participation that is granted to students is notable considering that previous literature notes that students are often marginalized by their placement in developmental education, whether intentional or not (Acevedo-Gil et al., 2015; Deil-Amen & Rosenbaum, 2002).

### **Method**

Data collection for this project took place in two stages. The first author conducted interviews with 14 Dream Catchers (hereafter, DC) faculty across most of the participating colleges across Texas. Most of the DC institutions are Hispanic-Serving Institutions, and some participating colleges such as El Paso Community College and South Texas College have student populations that are more than 80% Latinx (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2017a;

2017b). The faculty who participated in this study varied in terms of experience with this model; about half of the participants had been involved with the DC programs on their campus and/or Catch the Next for 4-5 years, another four were in their first year as faculty in the program. This allowed for the researchers to gather a wide array of experiences with this program.

The faculty were recruited via email. The faculty were identified using the Catch the Next directory of personnel on their participating college campuses as well as by looking at the schedule of classes at each college and seeing who was teaching sections of courses assigned to the DC cohorts. Emails were sent to individuals with the option to participate in face-to-face, phone, or virtual interviews. Approximately 30 faculty members across 10 colleges were contacted to participate in this study, and 14 consented to participate. Most of the interviews took place at the DC Fall Institute in 2016, a three-day professional development workshop in San Antonio for newer faculty members with workshops led by seasoned instructors across the participating colleges. Other interviews took place either on or off campus, based on individual preferences. Interviews lasted approximately 45-75 minutes using a semi-structured interview protocol. Table 1 provides information on the participants of this study. All participants' names in this study are pseudonyms.

### **Analysis and Truthworthiness**

Interviews were transcribed and provided to each faculty participant for feedback. Transcripts then coded in rounds to generate themes for analysis. In the first round, process coding (Saldaña, 2016) was specifically used to focus on the action and steps faculty members took in order to adopt elements of a multicultural curriculum into their classrooms. Process coding is action and verb-oriented in nature, so a focus on these verbs ("helping," "making the connection," "mentoring," etc.) was used. Codes were organized into categories following the

first round of coding in order to collapse redundant codes and to broadly examine how codes could be arranged into groups such as “professional development,” “classroom activities,” and “college-going culture”. Using the categories developed from this process, a second round of coding utilized axial coding to determine which codes stood out as more dominant than others and to place these categories into the themes presented in the findings (Saldaña, 2016).

Throughout both rounds of coding, reflective memos were generated to make sense of the findings, to make connections among the participants’ narratives, and to connect the theoretical framework to the themes that emerged from the data.

The researchers utilized trustworthiness measures to ensure the quality of the data and the analysis. First, each participant was provided copies of their interview transcripts, and feedback was sought on these transcripts to ensure that each participant felt comfortable with the data that would be used about them. The researchers also utilize thick description (Hays & Singh, 2012) in order to provide as much detail as possible about the instructors, their colleges, and the work they do on their campuses. For triangulation purposes, other text-based data such as faculty training materials and campus-generated artifacts (e.g., press releases, promotional videos) were collected and analyzed.

### **Limitations**

As with any study, this present study has some limitations. First, this article focused on the faculty experience of working within the program. The next step in this research was to focus on the student experience and how participation in the Dream Catchers program has impacted students’ academic performance and goals. Second, this data was limited to interviews and document analysis and did not include formal classroom observations or other types of data collection in real-life settings. Last, this study did not include outcomes data from the program’s

participating to show how students are performing on their respective campuses through an overview of that data is available on the Catch the Next website (Our Results, n.d.).

### **Findings**

The introduction of a multicultural curriculum for community college students is less about content knowledge, which faculty receive in their graduate programs, and more about a pedagogical approach and how the guiding principles of the program percolate through the syllabus, content, and outside activities. This approach includes celebrating diversity, exploring the relationship between power and difference, and drawing on the power of education for transformative change in one's life (Bruch et al., 2010). This framework's broadness makes it applicable to developmental education classrooms across subject areas, including in integrated reading and writing, and student success courses.

### **Preparing Faculty for a Multicultural Developmental Classroom**

As preparation for teaching in the program, faculty spend a week on a university campus with Dream Catchers faculty and staff from throughout the state of Texas during the summer. During the summer institute, faculty receive training on core principles of the program, *familia* (building a sense of family in classrooms) and *cariño* (treating the students with affection and care), as well as completing hands-on exercises that can be easily incorporated into the classroom. In describing the summer institute, Caroline stated:

You start with an intense training that lasts for five days. It was intense, it's from 8-5 or 8-6. What I love is that they are giving you materials, lessons that you can take back and use in the classroom. I mean, I don't know how many in-services I have sat through where I got nothing to take back. It was all ideology or whatever—but [Dream Catchers]

gives you something that you can go back and use in your classroom. Here's a lesson, here's an essay, here's something you can use.

This sentiment was echoed by Betty who stated, "There's continual focused experiential training for the faculty that are participating in the program. The first thing was the summer institute. Then, you go into your classroom and you apply the skills learned."

Throughout their first academic year, new faculty receive ongoing trainings in the form of two other multi-day teaching institutes in the fall and spring semesters and monthly professional development calls. Throughout the course of the year, Humberto called the training spaces "a positive atmosphere and you really get to grow as a faculty in general, as an instructor and as a Dream Catchers member also." At the institutes, faculty receive hands-on training on specific lessons they can apply directly into their classrooms such as narrative essays that begin to acclimate students to writing and boost their comfort level with their instructors. Caroline described the writing in the first weeks of the class as a means to get to know her students, to assess what their needs would be moving forward, and to get the students to trust her. This type of narrative writing differs from the more typically persuasive or expository writing expected in college writing classes, but as Rachel explained,

We get hung up on what the learning outcomes of the course are and preparing them for the next course [Composition I]. As a writing instructor, I know how important it is to do narrative writing. It was like Dream Catchers was just going, 'Yeah, it's okay.' I felt better about [that].

Despite deviating from the normal expectations of the developmental class, albeit temporarily, the Dream Catchers curriculum enabled faculty to have time to take stock of their classes and to build a rapport with their students before moving into deeper content.

### **Multicultural Curriculum in Practice**

In terms of taking stock of the classes, the faculty also have to know who their students are. Considering that some participating colleges have 80% or more Latinx student bodies, the prevalence of Latinx-focused readings is not surprising. However, the faculty were quick to point out the diversity of their Latinx students across many categories: most are first-generation college students; some are born in the United States while others emigrated to the United States; some are undocumented; some students live across the border in Mexico; their students show varying degrees of English proficiency; many students work at least part-time; and there are returning students who are older than 25, veterans, students who are parents, and so forth. Faculty also described their non-Latinx students who came from places as diverse as Vietnam, Rwanda, and various parts of the Middle East.

At a college in the Gulf Coast Region of East Texas, the instructors responded to their institution's diversity by using readings on the immigrant experience in the United States. Rachel stated, "We were going to incorporate a lot of Asian and Arabic and all types to make it culturally relevant for all. We had to be able to use a variety of sources." Even when reading about cultures different from their own, students could make connections between their own experiences and, for example, the experience of an author whose Korean mother struggled for decades to learn English and needed help translation from him.

Within the INRW and Composition I courses, various instructors focus on other themes that enable students to think critically about social issues. By bringing in content that is relevant to students, Gabriel made the case that class discussions became more lively and fruitful for students:

The students participate. They've got examples. Those things really foster good critical thinking on their part because they're starting to understand why they're doing things, what's expected of them, why those things are expected of them. They're asking some pretty big questions of themselves.

Beginning with the concept of death and how it is commemorated with the Mexican holiday *Día de los Muertos*, Gabriel then fostered reading and writing assignments that asked students to think about death across cultures, religions, and how they think about death in their own lives.

This type of cross-cultural exchange was present in the student success courses as well. For instance, Carmen's student success course focused heavily on fostering a growth mindset in students. To supplement the textbook that introduced students to study skills, time management, and other strategies for success in college, Carmen assigned readings by authors from various backgrounds (e.g., African, indigenous, Mexican American) who discussed struggles they encountered in life and how they overcame them. Through these stories, Carmen and her students explore cross-cultural themes that relate directly to the course, especially self-responsibility, self-awareness, interdependence, and maintaining focus.

The issues of race, class, privilege, and others are reinforced on campuses through various community services projects students are encouraged to organize and participate in. Students at Houston Community College collected personal items such as diapers and sanitary products for a local charity while the South Texas College cohort organized a walk to benefit a local cancer organization. These service-learning projects, as Jocelyn put it, are the first time many students have done community service and "They understand the value of giving. It doesn't matter that you don't have a lot, but you have a lot more than others." This experience

also reinforces a core value of the Dream Catchers program to instill the importance of giving back to one's community.

To build community, namely *familia*, within the classroom, the instructor utilized peer feedback and workshopping techniques to help students work through readings, to annotate texts, and to discuss the strengths and places for improvement in their writing. The technique of having students read their papers aloud to other students was new to John, but he found that it also helped students validate the quality of each other's writing and point out places to clarify or elaborate further in non-threatening or punitive ways. If a student missed class, instructors could often count on other students to let them know where the student was or for other students to call or text the student to find out where they were. The impact of this, as Humberto said, was that Dream Catchers students were more close knit and accountable to one another.

In the student success course, many of the faculty described content that teaches students a growth mindset, how to seek out campus resources, and how to take responsibility for one's self along with basic skills such as note-taking and time management. For example, Carmen talked about her students' fears that they are not ready for college or that they will not meet their family's expectations. She explained, "For [my students], having an instructor who wants to be there and who wants them to be as successful as they want to be, that's college success to them." Throughout the interviews, the faculty acknowledged their role in their students' success and how a big part of that success was showing up when students needed them.

The out of course activities, such as events to local museums, plays, and baseball games, or the campus visits to other universities were also transformative to students. As Gabriel described,



[Out of class activities get] them to do something that perhaps they wouldn't normally do. A lot of the students here in El Paso don't go beyond their neighborhood. They don't even go across town. To expose them to certain things like that, whether they've gotten exposure to it before or not, really opens up their worlds. They get that there's more than just 'I go to school and then I come home. I go to work, I come home.' It gives them exposure to something beyond the limitations of their neighborhood or even the college. Similarly, visits to four-year universities exposed students to life beyond their community college. The colleges worked to take students to at least two universities, one local and one out of their geographic area. On out-of-town visits, students were given the opportunity to sleep in dorms and explore the campuses. All the faculty who accompanied students on campus visits echoed Diana's sentiment:

I think when they first set foot over there [on a four-year campus], they're kind of in shock. I think that it's inspiring for them. I think that if all else, it does give them that motive 'I need to start thinking about where I'm going.' That's really what we want them to do.

The purpose of the Dream Catchers curriculum is to empower students to see the possibilities and opportunities education can make for their lives, and to provide them with the skills and knowledge they need to pursue their academic goals. By the next academic year, both Diana and Elena talked about their students who became more involved on their campuses, through student government, campus activities boards, and the Dream Catchers student club. Students who entered college in August unsure of whether they were "college material" not only persisted into year two but also engaged more with their student life on campus.

### **Incorporating Cultural Understandings in Developmental Classrooms**

Adding service-learning components to courses or providing campus visits is arguably not new. As Elena pointed out, the Dream Catchers program offered many of the same aspects as the honors program on her campus: special advising, mentoring, and programming. However, there is an intentionality of *cariño* and *familia* that do make a difference.

One instance of treating students with affection is the willingness to share deeply personal experiences with students in order to demonstrate understanding. Jocelyn told her students,

I want you guys to visualize a female that drops out of high school at 16, gets married at 17, and has a child at 18. Do you think that person is able to succeed? A lot of them are like, 'No. Maybe, but it's going to be real hard.' Then I tell them, 'Well, that's me. That's who I am.'

By sharing her story, Jocelyn felt that she could be an example of how students can succeed even when the odds are stacked against them. What is more, she shares her narrative of how she could have been an educational statistic when she dropped out of school rather than an exception when she returned and completed her education, including a doctoral degree. As she reaffirmed throughout her interview, Jocelyn felt that success was about teaching her students, "It's all about the *ganas* [a Spanish word that denotes dreaming about the impossible and having the guts to go for it]." Her own story served as a starting point for teaching students about growth mindsets, about putting in hard work, and in having faith that the sacrifices they made would be worth it. Jocelyn gave credit to her students who she said inspired her to pursue her doctoral degree in Educational Leadership. Jocelyn anticipated walking the stage for her doctoral graduation at the same graduation ceremony where some of her Dream Catchers students would be receiving their bachelor's degrees from an area university.

For Diana and Martín, two student success instructors from the same college, a crucial part of the Dream Catchers model was a willingness to stop and deal with students' real-life issues as a course as a *familia*. Martín gave the example:

There's sometimes where some issues that come [up] that are really personal issues in their home life. We have the Vegas mentality—what happens in Vegas stays in Vegas. What happens in this classroom stays in this classroom. We can talk about some really pressing issue. We can talk sometimes if somebody is homeless or going to be homeless--Maybe one student can help the other. Through that network, through that 25 students that are in the classroom, maybe we can help this student that's going to become homeless. Maybe we could find a place for them. It's something different. It's academic stuff, but it's real life events that probably [have] a greater impact, that absolutely have a greater impact than their intellectual where they're at.

If students entered Martín's class asking about financial aid, he arranged for a financial aid representative to meet with his students during class meetings. Despite being "remedial" students, Martín consistently reiterated that his students were capable of great things and they needed support to help them achieve what they set out for.

Nearly across the board, the faculty spoke of the time demands of the program. Along with the students attending out of class activities, faculty are expected to join their students as well. Five faculty members mentioned that their students have their personal cell phone numbers and gave students permission to call and text them as needed. Both John and Gabriel noted that though it was unintentional, they were more available and more supportive to their Dream Catchers students than others because of how involved the program requires faculty to be. It is the intentional investment in students, in approaching students with *cariño*, and in building

*familia* that provided students with a sense that they have the support they need for the long-term. When asked what different the Dream Catchers program makes for students, Martín responded:

For me, I think what I really see as important that [students] carry with them is that they are able to work with somebody, with a counselor, with an instructor, somebody that really has a concern for their well-being, for their academic well-being, to make sure that there's resource where they can go and receive help whether it's with financial aid, whether it's in registering in the classes that they need, whether it's them taking their correct courses for their degree, whether it's an issue they might have at home. Then later on, whenever they get ready to graduate and transfer, if you're going to write a letter of recommendation so they can get into the university. It's those kinds of things. It's the things that just having a resource that they can go to, somebody that can help them beyond the classroom.

The program requires great investments of time and effort on the part of faculty, but nearly every seasoned faculty member who had taught for at least one full year in the program could point to a success story of students who transferred to a four-year university and completed a bachelor's degree. Most faculty members had stories of students who arrived in their classes shy and unsure of themselves, and who blossomed over the course of the semester or two semesters. It was these tangible efforts that made the work worth it.

### **Discussion**

This study focused on the professional development of faculty who deliver a multicultural developmental curricula on their campuses through the Dream Catchers program in Texas. The concept of a multicultural developmental curricula was introduced over a decade ago

(Bruch et al., 2004), and while the racial disparities in developmental education persist (Bahr, 2010), little research has focused on how to build a multicultural curriculum at this level that is relevant to students of color. This sort of curriculum celebrates diversity, questions power and privilege, and recognizes the role of education in transforming students' lives (Bruch et al., 2004). The Dream Catchers program is not only for Latinx students, but Latinx students have largely been the main population served by this program given the regions where the program operates (Chavez, 2016; Participating Colleges, n.d.).

Every part of the program, from its professional development of faculty and staff to the course content and out-of-course activities, incorporate research and cultural understandings about Latinx students, other minoritized populations as needed, first-generation college students, and the surrounding regions where the colleges are located. Other events, such as the university campus visits, expose students to the possibilities available to them with the attitude of "*Si se puede!*" [Yes, we can]. The faculty who participated in this study were well aware of inequalities in the educational system at both the K-12 and higher education levels, and the role that a program like Dream Catchers could play in boosting the confidence that students have in themselves as well as increasing their readiness for college-level work. The Dream Catchers professional development provides faculty with new perspectives on their students' lives, the mentoring and support to discuss challenges on their campuses with faculty at other participating colleges, and hands-on pedagogical tools to implement this program successfully. The Dream Catchers model does not necessarily focus on faculty members' content knowledge expertise in its professional development. Instead, the Dream Catchers' model influenced the delivery of the content, the underlying approach to students, and incorporated out of class activities to provide students with higher levels of engagement and motivation for college in ways that students

would likely not otherwise receive. In short, rather than focusing on the *skills* diverse students in developmental education need to be successful, this curriculum focuses on the *student*—their personal cultural backgrounds, their short and long-term goals, and the broadly defined skills and knowledge they need to be successful in their first year of college and beyond.

Through participation in this program, students receive a holistic approach to their academic and personal needs. Students in the program sign up for an intensive program when they enroll in the Dream Catchers program, but they also sign up for the chance to receive targeted academic advising, mentoring by their instructors and community mentors, involvement in a student group that participates in college events, and extracurricular activities such as visits to a local university and local arts events. Through these various mechanisms, the Dream Catchers delivers many of the best practices named by previous research on engaging diversity in developmental programs (Boylan et al., 2003).

This study substantiates the recommendations that come from the research on professional development in developmental education and higher education more broadly, namely that ongoing professional development is important (Bickerstaff & Cormier, 2014; Boylan & Saxon, 1998) and that instructors need a strong commitment to teaching these students (Boylan, 2002). This study extends this research by giving concrete examples of what effective training looks like over time and how fully supporting students in developmental education means that instructors must be prepared to invest more than time in their classrooms.

This study also brings forth the multicultural lens of developmental education curricula that has been critically understudied in higher education. Though the Dream Catchers curriculum originally intended to target the Latinx student population of Texas, the faculty found ways to broaden assignments and readings so that they speak to all students in their courses,

including Latinx students from countries other than Mexico, African American students, Vietnamese and Rwandan students—and White students, for that matter. Developmental education courses serve as a useful place for colleges to build their students' literacy skills while also challenging students through reading and writing assignments and class discussions on social issues relevant to their lives.

### **Implications**

The Dream Catchers program offers several lessons for developmental educators, administrators, and policy makers across the country.

#### **Implications for Practice**

First, this study demonstrates the potential power that a multicultural developmental curriculum offers to students of color who are overrepresented in developmental programs across the country. A focus on Latinx students is important, given the increases in their enrollment in higher education both now and what is projected in the future (Krogstad, 2016). The professional development provided by this program to the colleges' faculty and staff is crucial in building a support network among the programs and in providing practical, hands-on examples of what lessons actually look like in the classroom. The writing faculty remain with their students for two classes, so they are given the chance to tailor their teaching and attention to the needs of students without losing time in the transition from the developmental course to Freshman Composition.

Given the intense nature of the work related to Dream Catchers in terms of training and the investments of time and effort required by the program, colleges might carefully consider several issues before investing in these programs. First, they can consider choosing faculty members who are committed to teaching developmental students. To better address student

issues when they arise, faculty might also collaborate with their colleagues to create a strong learning community and to be communicative with their teaching counterpart and advisors when student issues arise. Next, colleges might consider training their faculty and staff in rounds over several years so that faculty can avoid fatigue or burnout by taking a year off without impacting the availability of the program. Training more faculty also provides more opportunities for a college to expand high-impact practices across campus.

### **Implications for Policy**

The *Puente* Project in California is collaboratively-funded and is offered in many high schools and community colleges throughout the state (The *Puente* Project, n.d.). In Texas, the costs are largely carried through grant funding pursued by Catch the Next, Inc., whose current funders include the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board and the Meadows Foundation, and the colleges themselves who may pursue outside funding sources such as Title V grants targeted for Hispanic-Serving Institutions.

### **Implications for Research**

As noted in the Limitations section, the next logical step in this research trajectory is to focus on the student experience in the Dream Catchers. This includes qualitative data that includes interviews and focus groups in order to find out how participation in this program impacts students' academic goals and their persistence. Quantitative data should take into account student outcomes, fall to fall persistence rates, and graduation and transfer rates. One forthcoming study (Singh, 2017) looks at the impact of the Dream Catchers program on students' sense of belonging over the academic year. More work like this is needed not only for program evaluation but to make the case that programs like this can boost institutional success in developmental education, especially for historically underserved groups.



### **Conclusions**

Historically underrepresented students such as Latinx students are too often caught in the trap of developmental education where they struggle to obtain the knowledge and skills they need to be successful in college-level work. Through the lens of a multicultural developmental curricula, the Dream Catchers program shows how programs can adapt their practices to provide teaching and services that address issues salient to students across racial/ethnic groups. A multicultural curriculum that provides content related to students' backgrounds, that is receptive to students' academic and personal needs, and that provides rich experiences for students that enable them to see beyond the walls of their college campuses and neighborhoods can impact students' academic trajectories in transformative ways. This study illuminates the professional development that goes into building such a program like the Dream Catchers program in Texas. While the time and labor costs of these programs can be high, so can their rewards as more students of color, low-income and first-generation college students make the transition from community college to four-year institutions and complete their academic goals, some of which students may have previously thought impossible.

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