PORTRAITS OF PEDAGOGICAL PROMISE: RENDERING VISIBLE SUCCESSFUL
TEACHING PRACTICES FOR LATINO MALE STUDENTS IN ONE NEW YORK
CITY PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOL

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ABSTRACT

PORTRAITS OF PEDAGOGICAL PROMISE: RENDERING VISIBLE SUCCESSFUL TEACHING PRACTICES FOR LATINO MALE STUDENTS IN ONE NEW YORK CITY PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOL

Kelly Gavin Zuckerman

Drawing upon a critical constructivist framework and informed by scholarship on culturally relevant, responsive, and sustaining pedagogy (CRRSP) and student voice, this qualitative study utilizes portraiture methodology to render visible successful teaching practices for Latino male secondary students in urban contexts by answering the following two research questions: 1) What are the pedagogical practices of three White male teachers in one New York City public high school that their Latino male secondary students identify as successful in supporting their educational potential?; and 2) How do these three teachers make sense of these identified practices and their success with Latino male secondary students? To achieve these goals, data was collected from four sources: 1) ethnographic observations; 2) semi-structured individual interviews; 3) semi-structured focus group interviews; and 4) written documentation, and was analyzed using constructivist grounded theory. The final products of this work are three pedagogical
portraits—written research documents that bridge science and art to lead to new or deeper understandings about teaching and learning.

Findings from this study indicate the saliency of pedagogies that authentically care for Latino male students in urban areas, support their academic achievement, and explicitly draw connections between course content and students’ interests, lives, and future goals. The resulting portraits also encourage consideration of how attention to the development of Latino male students’ cultural and linguistic competence and dexterity as well as their sociopolitical awareness could further support the academic and personal growth of these young men. These findings: 1) contribute to a limited research base on successful teaching practices of Latino male secondary students in urban communities; 2) support more tailored recommendations for educational policy aimed at leveraging the unique potential of Latino young men in our nation’s cities; and 3) can inform the professional development of both pre-service and in-service school actors who work with Latino male students. Such contributions are particularly significant given the existing patterns of underachievement and untapped promise of Latino male youth across the country.
DEDICATION

For my family whose love and support sustained me through this journey.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To Mr. Poole, Mr. Harrison, and Mr. Nelson, thank you for opening up your classrooms and your practices to me. I am humbled and honored to have been a witness to your work. Thank you for trusting me to depict it authentically.

To my student participants, thank you for confirming my belief that students have critical perspectives to offer research, policy, and practice aimed at improving the educational experiences of youth in urban schools. I am grateful for the willingness and thoughtfulness with which you joined me in this project and for your keen and creative insights.

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continuing to cheer each of you on as you continue on your personal and professional paths.

Finally, to my family, thank you for loving me unconditionally. I have reached the conclusion of this journey because of your unwavering support. I am forever grateful for each act, small and large, that enabled me to do this work and to finish what I started. The sweetness of this moment is ours to share.

K.G.Z.
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In the spring of 2015, Carlos, Luis, and Ismael1, three 16-year-old Latino male students from Hilltop High School in New York City, rode the 1 train down to 116th and Broadway to meet at Teachers College, Columbia University as a part of an inquiry group about the educational experiences of Latino young men in New York City public high schools. Each week, we gathered in a small library conference room over lemonade and grapes, apple juice and homemade brownies, to consider the purpose of schooling, to try to make sense of an achievement gap that disproportionately affects young men of color, and to hypothesize about what could be done to make high school a more welcoming and relevant institution, particularly for Latino male students. Our discussions, especially those about reversing the tide of Latino male underachievement, hovered around a single variable—teaching practice. Time and time again, Carlos, Luis, and Ismael imagined out loud a schooling experience in which more teachers “got them” and fondly recalled the teachers who did. Through countless anecdotes and stories shared over the course of a semester, these young men passionately described pedagogical promise in urban classrooms, which I define as care-full teaching that allows youth of color to succeed academically by fostering their academic and cultural identities. In an educational climate in which “urban” is so often synonymous with pathology and failure, their thoughtful descriptions of promising practices were uplifting and inspiring—a welcome respite from an often-overlooked source in urban school reform.

Working with Carlos, Luis, and Ismael over several months reminded me of the importance of seeking out student voice in any conversation about successful teaching.

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1All student and school names are pseudonyms.
As an English teacher at their small public high school for five years, I often engaged my students in critique of my own practice—soliciting advice from the very people who I sought to serve. This pedagogical approach is rooted in a deep-seated belief that students have invaluable insight to share about teaching that is a product of my own educational autobiography. Growing up in an affluent, majority-White suburban community and attending my neighborhood public high school, I was afforded frequent opportunities to share my voice about the pedagogy in practice in my classrooms. These opportunities were both informal and formal—from a conversation with a teacher in the hallway between classes to a request from the principal to attend the interviews of potential teaching candidates. As a high school student, I had no doubt that my voice was heard. I knew that my voice mattered.

As a student of urban education over the past thirteen years, I know now that the ability to be heard “in the acoustic of school” (Arnot et al., 2001, quoted in Rudduck and Demetriou, 2003, p. 278) is not a universal right. Instead, it is often a function of one’s social location in this world (Nieto, 1994). Accordingly, it was not and is not the reality for many high school students, particularly those who have been consistently academically and socially marginalized (Nieto, 1994). It was not and is not the reality for many students like Carlos, Luis, and Ismael.

Inspired by our work together in the spring of 2015 and by the insights offered by my many Latino male students over the years, this study looks to include the voices of Latino male secondary students along with their teachers in the discussion about successful teaching practice for Latino young men. In doing so, it seeks to provide
nuanced, comprehensive, and complex portraits of pedagogical promise in action that are authentic to the experiences of both teachers and students alike.
Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

Statement of Problem

In *The Latino Education Crisis: The Consequences of Failed Social Policies*, Patricia Gándara and Frances Contreras (2009) offer a clarion call for all educators, policymakers, and citizens interested in the health and wellness not only of U.S. schools, but also of our nation. “Today the most urgent challenge for the American educational system,” these scholars contend, “has a Latino face” (p. 1). According to the U.S. Census Bureau, one in four children enrolled in America’s K-12 public schools will be Latina/o by 2021 and projections estimate that Latina/o youth will account for more than half of all public-school students by 2050 (Fry & Gonzales, 2008; National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES), 2009). As the largest minority group in the U.S. and the fastest growing segment of the school-age population, it is not hyperbolic to argue that our national success is dependent upon the success of Latina/o youth (Gándara, 2010).

Fueled by this demographic reality, Latina/o academic underachievement has importantly

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1 While acknowledging a recent turn towards the usage of the term Latinx as a gender-neutral alternative to Latino, Latina, and Latin@ in some scholarly literature on Latinos/as in the United States, the majority of the extant literature on Latina/o youth does not yet utilize this terminology. In order to enter both historical and more contemporary conversations, this study utilizes the terms “Latina/o” and “Hispanic” interchangeably to refer to all individuals in the United States whose origins are from the Spanish-speaking regions of Latin America, including the Caribbean, Mexico, Central America, and South America. Additionally, given that the Latina/o population in the U.S. is importantly not a monolith, the study will also differentiate by national origin subgroup identifiers (e.g, Puerto Rican, Mexican, Dominican, etc.) whenever possible.
and deservingly received attention as one of the most pressing and complex educational issues in the United States today (Center for the Study of Race and Equity in Education, 2012).

While more recent reports highlight positive trends in Hispanic educational indicators including a historically low national high school dropout rate (14%) and a historically high national college-going rate (69%), significant challenges remain (Fry & Taylor, 2013). Latina/o students continue to lag behind their White and Asian counterparts on a number of key educational measures including high school graduation and bachelor’s degree attainment (Contreras & Contreras, 2015; Fry & Taylor, 2013; Pino, Martinez-Ramos, & Smith, 2012). To illustrate, in 2014-2015, the national adjusted cohort graduation rate for Latina/o public high school students was estimated at 76% compared to 88% for Whites and 90% for Asians (NCES, 2016). At the postsecondary level, 16% of Latinas/os ages 25 and older had earned a bachelor’s degree in 2015 as compared to 36% of Whites and 54% of Asians (Ryan & Bauman, 2016).

Such gaps in academic achievement are especially stark for the nation’s Latino young men. In 2014, the national high school graduation rate for Latino males was estimated at 65%, compared to 80% for White males (The Schott Foundation, 2015). For the 2006 starting cohort at all four-year colleges and universities nationwide, 48% of Latino males graduated within 6 years, compared to 60% of White males and 68% of Asian males (Kena, Aud, Johnson, Wang, Zhang, et al., 2014). In urban contexts like New York City, the numbers are even more disheartening. There, the 2013 four-year Latino male high school graduation rate was just 52%, 11 percentage points lower than White male students in the district and 13 percentage points lower than the national
average (The Schott Foundation, 2015). Thus, while it is indeed promising that more Latino males are now part of the largest minority group to seek postsecondary education in the United States (Fry & Taylor, 2013), our communal optimism should be tempered by the knowledge that high school graduation let alone college completion for Latino male youth, particularly in our nation’s largest cities, is far from guaranteed.

Given that educational attainment is intimately tied to occupational opportunity and success (United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014) as well as to individuals’ relationships with the criminal justice system (Lochner & Moretti, 2001), it is unsurprising that existing patterns of Latino male educational underachievement have contributed to large and persistent gaps in occupational choice, potential earnings, and incarceration rates for Latino males across the United States. While it is important to note that Latino males hold a variety occupations, professions, and positions in U.S. society, research indicates that they are overrepresented in jobs that are low-skilled, low-paying, less stable, and more hazardous (Maldonado & Farmer, 2007). As a corollary, Latino males are underrepresented in the highest paying job sectors including managerial and professional occupations as well as those in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (Zalaquett & Baez, 2012). Such employment and earnings patterns contribute to a high concentration of poverty in Latina/o communities (Noguera & Hurtado, 2012). While not all Latinas/os are poor, nearly two thirds (62%) of Latina/o children live in or near poverty (Wildsmith, Alvira-Hammond, & Guzmán, 2016). These impoverished communities are also affected by the overrepresentation of Latino men in the criminal justice system (Ulmer, Painter-Davis, & Tinik, 2016). It is important to note that certain national origin subgroups are particularly vulnerable to these hardships and
challenges (Torres & Fergus, 2012). For example, Mexican American males in California are more likely to be incarcerated than their Cuban and South American peers (Torres & Fergus, 2012). Thus, increasing the educational attainment and thus, occupational opportunities and life chances of Latino young men across the country will require a better understanding of the diversity within the Latino male population, the barriers that these youth face, as well as an investigation of the means through which schools and communities can best meet their specific needs (Villavicencio, Bhattacharya, & Guidry, 2013).

To this end, politicians and policymakers at both the local and national levels have galvanized political will and financial support in recent years to address the unique challenges facing these young people. For example, in August of 2011, former New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg launched the Young Men’s Initiative (YMI), a $127 million public-private partnership designed to address the disparities that exist between Black and Latino male youth and their White and Asian counterparts across multiple sectors including education, health, employment, and the criminal justice system (New York City Office of the Mayor). More recently, in 2014, President Barack Obama made an explicit commitment to expand opportunities for young men of color during the remainder of his tenure through his My Brother’s Keeper initiative (MBK) and after, through his My Brother’s Keeper Alliance (The White House, 2015). These initiatives seek to address persistent opportunity gaps faced by young men of color, including Latino males, by connecting these young people to support networks and educational environments in which they can develop the skills to succeed and lead in today’s world
(The White House, 2014). Speaking about why such work is of national concern,

President Obama explains:

After all, these boys are a growing segment of our population. They are our future workforce. When generation after generation, they lag behind, our economy suffers. Our family structure suffers. Our civic life suffers. Cycles of hopelessness breed violence and mistrust. And our country is a little less than what we know it can be. So, we need to change the statistics—not just for the sake of the young men and boys, but for the sake of America’s future. (The White House, 2014, para 21)

This work, Obama argues, will not be easy. “Broadening the horizons for our young men and giving them the tools they need to succeed will require a sustained effort from all of us” (The White House, 2014, para 27).

Though conversations about the educational experiences and needs of Latino male youth appear to be growing in presence and volume in the political and policy arenas in recent times, discussions within the academy regarding addressing the unique educational needs of these students continue to reside on the margins. A review of the extant literature reveals that a dearth of empirical research exists on the educational experiences of Latino male high school students specifically (Noguera & Hurtado, 2012). Instead, research on Latino male high school students is most often conducted in tandem with their Latina female counterparts.

While Latino males and Latina females may share an ethnic identity and in some cases, the same socioeconomic background and even school setting, neither their educational experiences nor their academic achievement outcomes are the same. For example, Latina females continue to outperform their Latino male counterparts in terms of both college access and degree attainment (Sáenz, Ponjuán, & Figueroa, 2016). The intersectionality of identity constructs such as gender, class, sexuality, ethnicity, and race
influence the way Latino young men are treated in society and shape their perceptions of social reality (Noguera & Hurtado, 2012). Scholars such as Nancy López (2003, 2012) have argued that the stigmatization and criminalization of Latino young men as violent and deviant in popular culture uniquely positions them as “problems” within school spaces, particularly high schools. Through their interactions with school personnel, Latino males receive both subtle and overt messaging that they are young people who are not expected to succeed academically. Such deficit perspectives, particularly those operationalized by teachers within classrooms, negatively influence the outlooks of Latino male high school students towards education and the future.

To combat such deficit-thinking, research on meeting the needs of Latina/o students highlights the importance of teaching that is culturally relevant, responsive, and sustaining (CRRSP) (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995a, 1995b, 2006, 2014; Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2014, 2017; Valenzuela, 1999). Introduced by Gloria Ladson-Billings (1994, 1995a, 1995b), culturally relevant pedagogy is an asset-oriented pedagogy that seeks to draw upon the social, cultural, and linguistic resources of students, families, and communities who have not been historically well-served by the nation’s public schools. Culturally responsive pedagogy, introduced by Gay (2000), argues that successful educators of ethnically diverse students teach to and through their students’ strengths as part of an ethic of action-oriented care. Valenzuela (1999) calls such care “authentic” rather than “aesthetic” in that it moves beyond surface expressions of warmth and belonging. Culturally sustaining pedagogy, coined by Django Paris (2012), extends the work of Ladson-Billings and Gay to further highlight the need for pedagogy that helps to perpetuate and foster the cultural and linguistic dexterity of youth and
communities of color. Such pedagogies have been shown to be particularly important for Latina/o youth who are immersed in an educational climate in which racism, linguicism, and xenophobia are prevalent and powerful (Irizarry, 2012).

According to scholars, Latina/o students in the nation’s high schools too often experience a watered-down curriculum and low academic expectations in which Latina/o students are taught to passively receive knowledge and to avoid independent and critical thinking (Cammarota & Romero, 2006). Such learning environments do not promote academic engagement or success. In contrast, teachers who enact CRRSP for Latina/o students in their classrooms expect excellence and provide appropriate scaffolding to help their students meet these goals (Feger, 2006; Sheets, 1995; Sosa & Gomez, 2012; Wortham & Contreras, 2002). In addition, CRRSP leverages knowledge of Latina/o communities and cultural practices in their curricula and classrooms to promote students’ cultural and linguistic competence and dexterity (Feger, 2006; Irizarry, 2011; Irizarry & Raible, 2011; Powell, 1997; Sheets, 1995; Wortham & Contreras, 2002). Finally, teachers who enact CRRSP create forums for Latina/o student voice that help Latina/o youth to develop the sociopolitical awareness necessary to speak to injustice (Feger, 2006; Cammarota & Romero, 2006; Rubin, 2014). All of these efforts are demonstrations of authentic care in which culturally relevant, responsive, and sustaining teachers affirm and nurture students’ academic, cultural, and linguistic identities (Antrop-González & De Jésus, 2006).

While the extant literature base on CRRSP for Latina/o secondary students has undoubtedly offered invaluable insight into what successful teaching may look like for Latina/o students broadly, it has not specifically attended to experiences of Latino male
youth. Given the disheartening data regarding the academic achievement of Latino male secondary students, particularly those who reside in urban communities like New York City, I argue that we need to more purposefully and exclusively explore the practices of teachers who are successful in supporting their unique needs. At a time when Latino male youth, especially those who reside in America’s largest cities, are depicted as lacking the qualities needed to succeed academically (Brown & Rodriguez, 2009; Cammarota, 2004; López, 2003; Noguera, 2007, 2012; Sosa & Gomez, 2012; Valenzuela, 1999), it is now, more than ever, important to learn about the practices of teachers in urban schools who are successful in helping them to achieve while sustaining their multifaceted identities. In the spirit of CRRSP and its attention to student voice, it is also, I argue, equally important to hear from urban Latino male secondary students themselves about why such practices are successful. As Halx and Ortiz (2011) contend, “The voice of the Latino male student must be considered in the process of improving their educational outcomes. We must listen to the student voice, not only during the classroom experience but also about the classroom experience” (p. 419). Otherwise, drawing upon the words of Cushman (2003), high school becomes something “done to” Latino male students, “not by” Latino male students.

Accordingly, this qualitative study is rooted in a critical constructivist framework that draws upon research on culturally relevant, responsive, and sustaining pedagogy and student voice to describe and analyze the practices of three White male teachers in one New York City public high school that 10 Latino male secondary students identify as successful in supporting their educational potential. Understandings gleaned from the research can assist secondary educators in New York City and urban communities
nationwide in developing a more concrete understanding of pedagogy and practice that facilitates Latino male school engagement as well as academic and personal growth.

**Statement of Purpose and Research Questions**

The purpose of the study is to explore the practices of three White male teachers in one New York City public high school that 10 Latino male secondary students identify as successful in supporting their educational potential. Seeking to render visible successful teaching practice for Latino male secondary students in urban contexts, the study utilizes portraiture methodology (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1983; Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997) to address the following two research questions:

1. What are the practices of three White male teachers in one New York City public high school that their Latino male students identify as successful in supporting their educational potential?
   a. In what ways, if at all, do the identified practices support these Latino male students’ academic achievement?
   b. In what ways, if at all, do the identified practices foster these Latino male students’ cultural and linguistic competence and dexterity?
   c. In what ways, if at all, do the identified practices further develop these Latino male students’ sociopolitical awareness?
   d. In what ways, if at all, do the identified practices reflect authentic care?
2. How do these three teachers make sense of these identified practices and their success with Latino male secondary students?
a. In what ways, if at all, do these teachers address supporting their Latino male students’ academic achievement?

b. In what ways, if at all, do these teachers address fostering their Latino male students’ cultural and linguistic competence and dexterity?

c. In what ways, if at all, do these teachers address further developing their Latino male students’ sociopolitical awareness?

d. In what ways, if at all, do these teachers address caring in authentic ways?

**Theoretical Framework**

Scholarship on CRRSP and student voice share a belief in knowledge as contextual, dialogical, and actively constructed by human beings. Joe Kincheloe (2005) labels such epistemological underpinnings “critical constructivism.” Critical constructivists are interested in the process of knowledge creation—in the role of context, perspective, and power. I argue that such an “epistemology of complexity” (p. 8) is particularly useful when examining the multifaceted and power-laden pedagogical landscape of urban schools. In lieu of flat and sterile depictions of classroom life, critical constructivism highlights the nuance present in any educational setting and encourages a close examination of the context of each teaching and learning encounter. Thus, in the case of this exploration of successful teaching practices for Latino male secondary students in one New York City public high school, a critical constructivist view considers not only what the practices are, but also to whom and for what reason they are successful.
in a particular context. In doing so, it seeks to produce a rich and complex picture of successful teaching for Latino male students in a specific time and place.

According to critical constructivists, different individuals coming from different backgrounds will see the world in different ways (Kincheloe, 2005). When thinking about the world of the urban classroom then, critical constructivists argue that all school actors, students and teachers alike, enter with unique views shaped by their own life histories and social locations. Accordingly, critical constructivists contend that “there is no one way of seeing the classroom, seeing intelligence, or seeing teacher or pupil success” (p. 27). In fact, critical constructivism posits that accepted definitions of social notions like “success” merit close questioning from a variety of angles. Therefore, in the case of exploring successful teaching practices for Latino male students in a comprehensive manner, critical constructivism calls us to attend to multiple perspectives—to those of both educators, the majority of whom are White, female, and monolingual (Banks & Banks, 2009; Gay & Howard, 2000; Ingersoll & Merrill, 2012), and the Latino male students with whom they work. In interpreting and reporting on these perspectives, researchers who utilize a critical constructivist framework also acknowledge their own positionalities and how these worldviews shape their interpretations and conclusions. Through such work, complex notions like “successful teaching” can be unpacked in more comprehensive and care-full ways.

Most saliently, critical constructivism highlights sources of subjugated knowledge and meaning-making often left out of academic discourse (Kincheloe, 2005). For critical constructivists, the experience of the marginalized is viewed as a valuable way of seeing the educational enterprise. Accordingly, in the urban classroom, the perspective of the
student, what Kincheloe calls the “view from below” (p. 162), is seen as a vital viewpoint—one that is too often overlooked or overshadowed in discussions of educational reform. It is here that critical constructivism most clearly speaks to the tenets that scholarship on student voice and CRRSP share.

Educational research that embraces student voice is rooted in a belief that students are “informants of their own lives” in school (Feuerverger & Richards, 2007, p. 556). Within the literature and within this study, student voice is both a reference to the literal sound of students’ words, but also to students having a legitimized presence in the discussion, implementation, and reformation of educational practices and policies that most deeply affect them (Cook-Sather, 2006). This focus on student agency is akin to CRRSP’s emphasis on equipping students with the skills to challenge the status quo. Through such pedagogical approaches, students are seen not as passive recipients of knowledge (Freire, 1993/1970), but as active participants in their own lives and learning. Accordingly, both research on student voice and scholarship on CRRSP embrace the critical constructivist notion that knowledge which is traditionally excluded, voices which are typically left unheard, need to be brought into the conversation. In this case, Latino male secondary students need to be seen as “authors of their own understanding and assessors of their own learning” (Cook-Sather, 2002, p. 5)—consultants in the discussion on what constitute successful teaching practices in urban classrooms for Latino young men.

Importantly, critical constructivists acknowledge that seeking to include the voice of the marginalized, to embrace student voice in any educational endeavor, whether research or practice, is neither easy, nor void of potential problems. The dominant model
of education has historically designated youth as *tabula rasa* or blank slates (Cook-Sather, 2002). As was described above, the identities of Latino young men are often even more dehumanized. They are depicted as deviant, dangerous, and certainly void of any credentials that merit attention to their views on education (Cook-Sather, 2002). Challenging such assumptions about young people is a crucial act of critical constructivism as is recognizing the power dynamics and ethical concerns at play in any attempt to truly “hear” student voice. As Fielding (2004) argues, “there are no spaces, physical or metaphorical, where staff and students meet one another as equals, as genuine partners in the shared undertaking of making meaning of their work together” (p. 309). While acknowledging the complexity and difficulty of such work, critical constructivism also points out the opportunities—the more expansive and inclusive view of education that is possible when you confront the faulty belief that schools and school reform are the exclusive purview of adults (Cook-Sather, 2002; Noguera, 2007). As Nieto (1994) argues, “students have important lessons to teach educators and we need to begin to listen to them more carefully” (p. 133). This study was conducted in this spirit.

**Significance of Study**

This study on the practices of three White male teachers in one New York City public high school that their Latino male secondary students identify as successful in supporting their educational potential has the opportunity to make significant contributions to the areas of educational research, policy, and practice.

First, this study contributes to a limited research base on successful teaching practices for Latino male secondary students in urban communities. While framing the
study in educational statistics and in doing so, acknowledging the patterns and trends that offer a troubling picture of Latino male academic achievement in U.S. high schools, the study seeks not to wallow in these numbers. Doing so would only further perpetuate a dominant, hopeless narrative about urban education—its students are failing and so are its teachers. In contrast, like Rodríguez and Oseguera (2015) and Harper (2015), I have chosen to denounce the deficit perspectives of Latina/o students that persist in discussions of U.S. schooling and instead offer promising portraits of successful teaching in action. Thus, this research helps to not only fill a gap in the literature on Latino male secondary students in urban schools, but also makes a meaningful contribution to what I hope will be an emerging body of wealth-driven (Yosso, 2005) scholarship on Latina/o youth and their teachers in America’s urban areas.

Secondly, the study’s exclusive focus on teachers’ educational practices that have been identified as successful by Latino male secondary students offers more tailored recommendations for policy aimed at leveraging the unique potential of Latino young men in our nation’s cities. While policy efforts to tackle the opportunities of both Black and Latino male youth together such as New York City’s Young Men’s Initiative (YMI) and President Obama’s My Brother’s Keeper (MBK) are admirable, the educational experiences of Black and Latino male youth are not innately the same. Though national indicators of academic achievement and educational success reveal that both groups are experiencing educational underachievement at alarming and unacceptable rates (Noguera, 2012), they are unique populations shaped by varying historical, political, social, cultural, and linguistic movements over time. As critical constructivism posits, students’ racial, ethnic, gender, and class locations will cause them to relate to their education differently.
(Kincheloe, 2005). Thus, the educational experiences of Black and Latino young men, just as those of Latina females and Latino males, are not necessarily identical. Accordingly, the study’s attention to the practices of successful teachers of Latino male students specifically honors both the particular challenges and possibilities of educating this growing population.

Finally, by rendering visible the practices of educators identified as successful by Latino male secondary students in portraits that are not only systematic and rigorous, but also appealing and accessible to practitioners in the field, findings from this study can improve the professional development of both preservice and inservice teachers and school actors who work with Latino male youth in urban settings. Results from this study can provide rich and nuanced content for teacher education and professional development programs to leverage in discussions about meeting the needs of Latino male students. Importantly, however, just as the purpose of education for critical constructivists “is not to transmit a body of validated truths to students to memorize” (Kincheloe, 2005, p. 3), the purpose of this study is not to transmit a body of validated practices for prospective and in-service teachers of Latino male students to imitate. I argue that no pedagogical recipe exists to effectively meet the needs of all Latino male youth in our nation’s cities. Instead, the study’s significance lies in its ability to offer a compelling and comprehensive look inside the practices of three educators in one New York City public high school that have the potential to both inform and to inspire conversation and action around improving the educational experiences of Latino male youth.
Chapter II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This literature review examines two complementary bodies of research, culturally relevant, responsive, and sustaining pedagogy (CRRSP) and student voice, and their intersection with the educational experiences of Latino male secondary students in urban areas. The chapter is divided into three sections. In the first section, I briefly trace the evolution of culturally relevant pedagogy and outline the relevant tenets of CRRSP—academic achievement (Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995a, 1995b, 2006), cultural and linguistic competence and dexterity (Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995a, 1995b, 2006, 2014; Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2014, 2017), sociopolitical awareness (Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995a, 1995b, 2006) and authentic care (Gay, 2000; Valenzuela, 1999) — that have been identified in the literature as successful in meeting the needs of youth of color. In the second section, I explore the classroom-based literature that has documented CRRSP practices in action, particularly those that have emerged as successful in supporting Latina/o secondary students in urban areas, as well as CRRS educators’ perspectives on these successful practices. In the third and final section, I discuss the relevant theoretical perspectives and critiques about including student voice in research about teaching and learning before highlighting the inclusion of student voice in the literature about the educational experiences of urban Latina/o secondary students broadly and Latino male secondary students specifically. In the end, I briefly synthesize findings across both
bodies of research before arguing that more research is needed that specifically
concretizes successful teaching practices for Latino male secondary students in ways that
incorporate both the perspectives of teachers and the Latino male students in their care.

**Section One: Culturally Relevant, Responsive, and Sustaining Pedagogy (CRRSP)**

The evolution of CRRSP is rooted in a broader educational narrative of “teaching
the culturally different” (Sleeter & Grant, 1987, p. 423). Emerging during the Civil
Rights Movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s, several educational movements
including desegregation, bilingual education, and special education sought to make
schooling more equitable for various groups (Sleeter & Grant, 1987, p. 421). One
movement that emerged during this time with particular relevance for youth of color was
multicultural education—“an approach to teaching and learning that focuses on students’
cultural and linguistic frames of reference, promotes social justice and equity, and affirms
the cultural diversity of students and teachers” (Irizarry, 2011, p. 31). Multicultural
education is based on a constructivist view of learning in which students actively build
new knowledge by drawing on prior knowledge and skills that are shaped within their
home and communities (Nieto, 1999). In this way, knowledge, as conceived by
multicultural education theorists, is socially and culturally constructed. An underlying
assumption behind multicultural education is that the traditional context of school
learning, which is a manifestation of European American culture, is often at odds with
this knowledge constructed within the home and communities of marginalized youth (Au
& Jordan, 1981). Irvine (1990), drawing upon her study of the experiences of Afrocentric
students in Eurocentric schools and borrowing a term from anthropology and history,
refers to this disconnect as a lack of “cultural synchronization.” Such lack of congruency between a student’s culture and the culture of school and its actors, multicultural education theorists contend, can result in cultural misunderstandings between teachers and ethnically diverse students and negatively impact student engagement and achievement.

Many early multicultural education reforms sought to remedy the cultural discontinuity that may exist within classrooms attended by students of color by prioritizing greater representation of culturally diverse groups in school curricula (Banks, 1994). Banks (2001) refers to such efforts as “additive” rather than “transformative” in that they do not disrupt the status quo. While adding ethnic content of cultural groups into existing curricula is important, it alone will not transform pedagogical practice. To more effectively address instruction, educational anthropologists, sociolinguists, and cultural ecologists in the 1980s called for teaching that is “culturally appropriate” (Au & Jordan, 1981), “culturally congruent” (Mohatt & Erickson, 1981), “culturally responsive” (Cazden & Leggett, 1976), and “culturally compatible” (Jordan, 1985; Vogt, Jordan & Tharp, 1987). These pedagogical approaches were grounded in the belief that successful teaching for youth of color is attentive to and inclusive of culture, conceptualized as not only “language and a catalogue of visible objects and events, but also the tacit knowledge that members of any community share” (Cazden & Legett, 1976). For example, in their seminal study of Native Hawaiian students, Au and Jordan (1981) found that when teachers of Native Hawaiian students changed their pedagogical practice and utilized story structures that were similar to those within Native Hawaiian culture, students’ reading achievement increased. Similarly, Mohatt and Erickson (1981) found that native
Indian students in Odawa, Canada benefited from interactions with teachers where speech patterns and communication styles reflected their home culture. These early calls for culturally responsive pedagogy framed successful teaching for youth of color as a “resource pedagogy” (Paris, 2012) in which students’ culture is viewed as a resource from which to build classroom curricula and practice.

In 1992, Luis Moll and colleagues famously developed a framework that embraced the core of these early pedagogical approaches—“funds of knowledge.” To these scholars, successful education for youth of color is that which leverages the “historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills” (p. 133) from their homes and communities. For example, in their research on working-class Mexican-American students in Tuscon, Arizona, Moll and colleagues found that families had knowledge about a diverse range of topics including agriculture, international commerce, medicine, and religion because of their unique sociopolitical and economic contexts. Successful teaching, these scholars contend, would actively draws upon these “funds of knowledge”—the cultural ways of doing, knowing, and being. To illustrate, teachers of Carlos, a first-generation, sixth-grade, Mexican-American student in Tuscon who spends the summers in Magdalena, Mexico with his extended family, could utilize his transnational experience as a foundation to explore in-depth issues that tie in with a sixth-grade curriculum like the study of other countries, different forms of government, and economic and legal systems. Such teaching would honor Carlos, his family, and their social world and help to bridge the gap between home and school that might exist for him and other Mexican-American students in his community.
While the early calls for culturally responsive pedagogy described above drew attention to the need for teachers to learn about students’ cultural identities, critics argued that their efficacy as approaches to meet the needs of youth of color in our nation’s schools were limited by their failure to attend to the political aspect of students’ identities (Villegas, 1988). Citing the inequities that schools and other societal institutions reproduce, Villegas argued that “culturally sensitive solutions to the school problems of minority students that ignore the political link between school and society are doomed to failure” (p. 253). In the mid-1990s, Ladson-Billings (1994, 1995a) sought to address this critical gap by creating a theory that attended to students’ academic achievement, their culture, and their political identities—culturally relevant pedagogy. Building off of her seminal study of “successful” teachers of African American students (Ladson-Billings, 1994), Ladson-Billings (1995a) defined culturally relevant teaching as, “a pedagogy of oppression not unlike critical pedagogy, but specifically committed to collective, not merely individual, empowerment” (p. 160). She argued that culturally relevant teachers are distinguished by three orientations towards their work with youth of color: 1) they hold the teaching profession, their students, and the community in high regard; 2) they foster connectedness between and among students; and 3) they believe knowledge is co-constructed continuously and fluidly by teachers and students, and suggested that culturally relevant practice could be characterized by three central dimensions: 1) academic achievement; 2) cultural competence; and 3) sociopolitical awareness, outlined below.
**Academic Achievement**

Academic achievement, the first dimension, refers to student learning, which Ladson-Billings (1994, 1995a, 1995b, 2006) defines as what students know and are able to do because of their interactions with successful educators. Culturally relevant teachers demonstrate their commitment to students’ academic success through a belief and understanding that all students can achieve academically. To illustrate, in Ladson-Billings’s (2009) study of the practices of eight elementary teachers who were identified as successful by the African American local community in meeting the needs of their African American students, Winston, a teaching veteran of forty years, offers the following about her students:

> You know, they’re all successful at something. The problem is that school often doesn’t deal with the kinds of things that they can and will be successful at... That’s why my class is a constant search for ways to be successful. That’s why we do so many projects in my class. I figure if we do enough different kinds of things we’ll hit on the kinds of things the kids can be successful with. Then I look for ways to link that success with other tasks. (p. 51)

Winston recognizes that many classrooms attended by African American children denigrate and disregard “the kinds of things that they can and will be successful at” (p. 51). Instead of demanding assimilation to what Delpit (1988) calls “the culture of power” and subscribing to fixed conceptions of knowledge in which knowledge is constructed by teachers alone and then deposited (Freire, 1993/1970) into students, Winston views knowledge as fluid and co-constructed by teacher and student. For example, she explains how her students’ natural curiosity about the “way things were” in the past inspired the creation of an intergenerational activity in which Winston’s fifth graders learned about leisure time during the late 1700s and early 1980s by crafting a quilt with the help of their...
family and community members. When, in Winston’s words, “a number of kids find out they’re pretty good at sewing—and I mean boys as well as girls” (p. 50), she uses their developing knowledge of and interest in this new art form as a “link” to other academic tasks including reading and writing about sewing and other crafts. Thus, knowledge creation in Winston’s classroom is a dialogical process in which students’ initial and developing curiosities guides curriculum creation and pedagogical practice. Through such efforts, her African American students are supported in achieving academically.

**Cultural Competence**

Cultural competence, the second dimension, refers to students’ recognition of their cultural identity and simultaneous understanding of the majority culture. Culturally relevant teachers teach “to and through” (Gay, 2000) the cultural and linguistic strengths of their students. For example, Tyrone Howard (2001a) described and examined the pedagogical practices that four elementary school teachers identified as effective by principals, parents, teachers, school district administrators, and civic leaders used with African American students in urban settings. Findings revealed that participants structured their classroom discourse patterns in ways that built off of and fostered their African American students’ verbal agility and propensity for oral language by recognizing that these were central means through which their students constructed knowledge. For example, Dorothy, a focal teacher, described how she structured her teaching in ways that allowed her students to utilize and further hone their verbal skills: “They [African American students],” Dorothy explained, “bring verbal skills that are a part of our culture…So one of the things that is really important to me is to help them identify that [they] have the strength, so how do you [get them to] transpose that into
[their] daily work?” (p. 190). To do so, she provided leadership opportunities like leading class discussions that capitalized on students’ verbal ability. Such efforts help to support the development of students’ cultural competence.

**Sociopolitical Awareness**

Finally, sociopolitical awareness, the third dimension, addresses students’ ability to use school knowledge and skills beyond the classroom to challenge social inequities. Culturally relevant educators support students in understanding and critiquing their social worlds. For example, Mr. Hasan in Lynn, Johnson, and Hasan’s (1999) study of an exemplary African American male teacher, sought to help students interrogate their notions of race and skin color prejudice. To do so, he asked his eighth-grade students to create a list of who they thought were the most beautiful African American women. In discussing the results, Hasan offered:

> Listen very closely to what I have to say. Most of the people you named are light-complexioned and have very long, straight hair. Very few dark-skinned women [were listed]. Most of us think that the lighter you are the better you are. ‘If you’re white, you’re all right. If you’re brown stick around. If you’re mellow, you’re yellow. If you’re Black, stay back…’…[W]e should not think that way. (p. 50)

Through this activity and resulting conversation, Hasan sought to encourage students to explore how society’s knowledge about beauty is racially and culturally constructed. Such classroom practices stimulate the development of students’ sociopolitical consciousness as well as greater self-awareness and self-acceptance.

**Extending the Theory of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy**

Since Ladson-Billings’s (1994, 1995a, 1995b, 2006) initial conceptualization of culturally relevant pedagogy and the tenets described above, scholars interested in equity,
access, and social justice have extended her theory in hopes of better addressing the
needs of culturally, ethnically, and linguistically diverse youth. In particular, the tenet of
cultural competence and the orientation towards classroom social relations have evolved
in ways that are important for this study of successful teaching for Latino young men.

**From cultural competence to cultural and linguistic dexterity.** Ladson-Billings’s (1994, 1995a, 1995b, 2006) assertion that culturally relevant pedagogy
supports students in maintaining “cultural integrity” (Ladson-Billings, 1995b, p. 160) by
utilizing students’ cultures as vehicles for learning has been taken up by scholars
interested in the education of linguistically marginalized youth, of which many of the
nation’s Latino male secondary students are a part (Hollie, 2001; Lucas & Villegas, 2011;
Lucas, Villegas, & Freedson-Gonzalez, 2008). These authors have argued that culturally
relevant teaching should not only develop students’ cultural competence, but should also
develop students’ linguistic competence. According to these scholars, successful teaching
of linguistically marginalized youth is linguistically responsive in that it helps students to
build bridges between what and in what language they already know and what and in
what language they need to know. For example, linguistically responsive teachers
encourage students to use books and other materials in their native language and to
interact with other students who speak their native language inside and outside of class.
These educators have an understanding that language, culture, and identity are deeply
interconnected and that valuing linguistically marginalized youth requires teachers to
value linguistic diversity and to teach accordingly.

Paris & Alim, 2014, 2017) have argued that teachers need to not only develops students’
cultural and linguistic competence, but also explicitly support students’ linguistic and cultural dexterity. Citing the demographically changing and interconnected world in which this century’s students live, Paris (2012) argues that successful teachers of youth of color must help students to develop the cultural and linguistic competence of their communities and at the same time support students in accessing and developing dominant cultural competence. For example, Paris contends that in today’s pluralistic society, both within-group cultural practices like the use of the Spanish language and common, across-group cultural practices like the use of Dominant American English need to thrive (Paris, 2011). Accordingly, successful educators assist students in becoming culturally and linguistically dexterous by helping them to fluidly toggle between and among languages depending upon context. In addition, Paris argues that teachers who support the educational potential of culturally and linguistically diverse youth embrace the hybrid ways that these languages are lived and used by young people in contemporary society. To illustrate, Paris cites Irizarry’s work (2007, 2011) on how Latina/o youth in the U.S understand and perform cultural fluidity—practicing both Spanish and English as well as participating heavily in African American Language and Hip-Hop cultures. These youth exhibit hybrid identities, further highlighting the diversity and complexity of the Latina/o population. If such diversity is to remain vibrant, Paris contends, successful educators must resist essentializing language practices and associating them with only certain racial or ethnic groups and instead honor and value the fluid and varied practices of communities of color. Pedagogical practices that achieve these goals, Paris argues, are not just culturally responsive or relevant, they are “culturally sustaining”—helping to perpetuate and foster a multilingual, multicultural, and multiliterate society.
From connectedness to authentic care. In addition to expanding Ladson-Billings’s (1994, 1995a, 1995b) initial conceptualization of cultural competence, scholars have offered additional conceptual and theoretical fodder to her assertion that culturally relevant teachers work towards creating connectedness among and between teachers and students in the classroom. For instance, Geneva Gay (2000) offered that successful teachers of students from historically marginalized communities care for students in culturally responsive ways. These educators do more than care about these young people and their language and culture. Instead they care for their students by forming an “ethical, emotional, and academic partnership with ethnically diverse students, a partnership that is anchored in respect, honor, integrity, resource sharing, and a deep belief in the possibility of transcendence” (p. 52). Particular to the Latina/o community, Angela Valenzuela (1999), in her seminal study of Chicano/a youth and the politics of caring, calls the creation of such a partnership, authentic rather than aesthetic care. For example, teachers who authentically care for students are those who not only foster warmth and intimacy in their relationships with students, but who also demand academic success and actively work to prepare students to achieve. To illustrate, Ms. Arada, a beloved Social Studies teacher in Valenzuela’s study of Mexican-American youth in a Texas high school, describes how she reacts to students who “act up”:

I ask them what it is that’s causing them to act in the way that they do? I always try to work things out with them individually. Sometimes, kids have certain problems that make me work out a personal arrangement with them. Like if they work a lot at night, I may tell them that they don’t need to take a test but that they could be evaluated by pursuing another kind of project. What’s important is that they need to know that I am fair, that I will listen to them, that they can come to me and talk and deal with a problem. (p. 100)
In lieu of labeling students who act in non-school-sanctioned ways as troublemakers or deviant, Ms. Arada authentically cares by working with students to create solutions that help them to choose academic excellence.

Other scholars have highlighted how authentic care for youth of color helps students to not only succeed academically, but also to understand and respond to racism, xenophobia, and linguicism that deeply affect their lives. Such care has been labeled “critical” by scholars focused on Latina/o youth (Rolón-Dow, 2005) and African American youth (Roberts, 2010) in that it resists traditional “color blind” approaches to care that look past students’ racial and ethnic identification and instead centers issues of race and ethnicity as a way to care for racially and ethnically diverse students. For example, successful teachers in Roberts’s study of teacher care for African American secondary students explicitly discussed the challenges that students would face as members of a marginalized population and the necessity of codeswitching. Such care has been shown to support the educational potential of racially and ethnically diverse youth by assisting them in understanding how to navigate the larger world.

**Defining CRRSP**

In seeking to acknowledge the evolution of Ladson-Billings’s original theory (1994, 1995a, 1995b), this study utilizes the term culturally relevant, responsive, and sustaining pedagogy (CRRSP) and culturally relevant, responsive, and sustaining (CRRS) as a descriptor for the educators who enact CRRSP. In doing so, it utilizes Geneva Gay’s (2010) conceptualization of culture as “a dynamic system of social values, cognitive codes, behavioral standards, worldviews, and beliefs used to give order and meaning to our own lives as well as the lives of others” (pp. 8-9) and foregrounds the tenets of

**Summary**

The emergence of CRRSP is rooted in a larger conversation around educational equity and access for students from historically marginalized communities. The work of Ladson-Billings (1994, 1995a, 1995b, 2006) provided the foundation for what we know of CRRSP today. The scholarship of others such as Gay (2000), Valenzuela (1999), and Paris (2012) have extended her original conceptualization of successful teaching for youth of color and have enhanced how scholars, policymakers, and educators think about what it means to make teaching and learning relevant and responsive to the cultures, languages, and literacies of racially, ethnically and linguistically diverse youth as well as how to foster and perpetuate students’ cultural and linguistic practices in our pluralistic society (Paris, 2012). In Section Two, I will further explore the extant literature that has documented CRRSP in action, particularly for Latina/o secondary students, and CRRS teachers’ perspectives on successful teaching practices for these young people in their care.
Section Two: Documenting CRRSP in Action

Classroom based-research on CRRSP has grown along with the theory over the past twenty years, beginning with Ladson-Billings’s (1994) own seminal study, *Dreamkeepers: Successful Teachers of African American Children*. Writing about this work, Ladson-Billings (1990) equates the process of “capturing” successful teaching practices in action to “trying to catch lighting in a bottle” (p. 343)—a difficult and delicate dance. Successful teaching of youth of color does exist, Ladson-Billings assures her audience, but the methodologies necessary to fully explore such success may need to be more “innovative and expansive” (p. 343). According to Ladson-Billings, researchers interested in capturing pedagogical excellence in action must be risk-takers “willing to tackle hard questions that inquire about the purpose of schooling, particularly for black and other minority students, and not shy away from the political implications of such study” (p. 343).

To that end, scholars over the past two decades have mainly utilized qualitative methodologies to document successful teaching for youth of color. Much of this research has focused on how teachers of ethnically diverse students make sense of their own successful practices (Wyngaard, 2007) and has documented their approaches with African American student populations alone or with Latina/o students. This research has revealed how CRRS teachers of African American and Latina/o students 1) hold high expectations of their students and provide scaffolded support to meet their academic needs; 2) use students’ cultures as vehicles for learning; 3) support students in examining
societal injustice; and 4) foster authentically caring relationships built on trust and understanding, detailed below.

**High Expectations and Scaffolded Support**

Existing scholarship documenting CRRS practices reveals that successful teachers of African American and Latina/o students create an academic climate in which excellence is anticipated and thus, planned for (Howard, 2001a, 2001b; Knight & Marciano, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Siddle-Walker, 1996). CRRS teachers exhibit an unfaltering belief in the ability and promise of their students and a willingness to provide scaffolded support to help their students meet their academic goals. For example, in Howard’s (2001a) study of the pedagogical practices that four elementary teachers used with African American students in urban settings, focal teacher Hazel describes the importance of marrying belief that all students can succeed with actions designed to foster this success:

> You hear everybody say all the time that ‘all kids can learn.’ Okay, and we should have high expectations, and we should tell them that we have high expectations, and I do all of those things. But it isn’t just enough to tell a child that you can do it. You also have to show the child how he can do it. (p. 194)

Hazel argues that high expectations alone will not ensure student learning, particularly for youth from historically marginalized communities. Instead, CRRS teachers of African American and Latina/o students express their belief that “all kids can learn” and marry that belief with action. In Hazel’s case, she acts by emphasizing skill-building in the classroom. For example, she helps her students to understand that “smartness” is not a fixed quality and that with ongoing practice, the development of solid study skills, and perseverance they can accomplish high-level academic tasks. In this way, she develops
students’ views of themselves as smart and capable while equipping them with the skills necessary to succeed at even the most challenging of educational endeavors.

**Using Students’ Cultures as Vehicles for Learning**

The literature base on CRRSP also highlights the importance of helping African American and Latina/o students come to understand and value their cultural heritage and identities by using students’ cultures as vehicles for learning (Boykin, 1994; Cahnmann & Remillard, 2002; Heath, 1983; Howard, 2001a, 2001b, 2002; Knight & Marciano, 2013; Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2002; Lee, 1995, 1998; Sleeter & Combleth, 2011). For example, Ms. Abrego, an art teacher whose practice was documented in Knight and Marciano’s (2013) study of who and what influenced 24 working-class ninth grade Black and Latina/o urban youth at a New York City public high school in their pursuit of college, describes an interdisciplinary art project that broadens her students’ understanding of their own culture and the culture of their classmates. She explains:

> I do an assignment that involves them bringing in something from their culture, and speaking about it in class, that way, it enables everybody to learn about Peruvians, or Dominicans, or Puerto Ricans, or African Americans, or Jewish people. So we learn from each other, and that’s very important. So they learn about themselves because they have to do research…we do an assignment that needs writing and artwork as well…. A calligraphy assignment that involves maybe pictures showing their culture, and they read the poem, and they tell us what it means to them, and how it brings them closer to their culture. (p. 49)

Through this activity, Ms. Abrego teaches “to and through” (Gay, 2000) the culture of her students. They are able to acquire and hone academic research skills necessary in college and beyond through an exploration of themselves, their families, and communities. In this way, students are encouraged to view their cultural background as well as the backgrounds of other classmates as rich and worthy of academic study.
Taking a more expansive view of culture, as articulated by Paris (2012) in his calls for culturally sustaining pedagogy, Morrell and Duncan-Andrade (2002), in their study of their own senior English class in a Northern California high school, support their mostly Latina/o and African American students’ academic achievement through drawing upon youth culture. In a unit designed to incorporate Hip-Hop music into a “traditional” poetry unit, these educators sought to use “students’ involvement with hip hop culture to scaffold the critical and analytical skills that they already possess” (p. 90). In doing so, they sent the message to students that the popular culture in which many were immersed not only had a place in the academic classroom, but also was a meaningful tool for academic and critical literacy development. This pedagogical approach assists students in seeing their culture as a valuable conduit for their learning.

**Supporting Students in Examining Societal Injustice**

Existing research on CRRSP practices for African American and Latina/o students also suggests that CRRS educators support students in examining societal injustice and oppression and assist them in developing identities as agents of change (Epstein, Mayorga, & Nelson, 2011; Knight & Marciano, 2013; Laughter & Adams, 2012; Lynn, Johnson, & Hassan, 1999; Tate, 1995). To illustrate, Epstein and colleagues (2011) describe how Ms. Vega, a culturally responsive U.S. history teacher in an urban low-income high school in New York City, develops her Latina/o and African American students’ sociopolitical awareness by foregrounding both the systematic nature of racism throughout U.S. history and the agency that people of color exhibited in the face of oppression. For example, in a three-week unit on the Civil Rights Movement, she spent a week focused on the Young Lords Party, a movement in the Puerto Rican community
that protested government racism in the 1960s. By highlighting not only the institutional and social structures of racism faced by the Puerto Rican community, but also those who mobilized to enact political and social change, Ms. Vega hoped that she would provide “examples of action’ that young people themselves might consider in dealing with racism and other acts of oppression in their lives” (p. 9). Ms. Vega further explained:

I want them to understand the system so they will not see themselves as defeated but as actors and see themselves as people who are now empowered with the knowledge that they can use. Students are familiar with injustice, so let’s look at it, look at where it comes from, how we got here, where we’re going and what we can do about it. (p. 9).

Ms. Vega acknowledged that students already had a certain level of sociopolitical awareness because of their familiarity with the “injustices” that they and others in their communities have experienced. Her teaching was designed to further develop this critical consciousness and support her students in developing effective strategies to navigate what is often a hostile world.

Building Authentically Caring Relationships Based on Trust and Understanding

Finally, the literature on CRRSP practices and African American and Latina/o students highlights the importance of teachers’ building authentically caring relationships with students based upon trust and understanding (Duncan-Andrade, 2007; Jackson, Sealey-Ruiz, & Watson, 2014; Watson, Sealey-Ruiz, & Jackson, 2016). For example, Mr. Lau, a successful teacher in Duncan-Andrade’s (2007) study of highly effective elementary and secondary teachers in South Los Angeles, explains how he views trust:

Many of the teachers I have been around can’t understand why students don’t trust them. They think of trust as something that is automatic for teachers, like students are just going to trust them because they are in the position of teacher. But, it doesn’t work like that. You have to earn it [trust] every day out here. Just because you have a bond with a student today doesn’t guarantee that that bond will be there tomorrow if
you don’t keep working on it. That’s just ahistorical. Let’s be real here. I represent an institution that represents the state that represents a history of colonialism and repression. Why would [emphasis in speech] students trust me? Every day I have to fight against that history. Sure, I’m mad about that, but it’s not the students’ fault and it’s not my fault, so I don’t take it personally. But, I do recognize that trust is easier to lose than to get. (p. 633)

CRRS educators like Mr. Lau understand that developing authentically caring relationships with African American and Latina/o students is not inherently easy. These educators are conscious of their identities as “ambassadors” of institutions that have at times represented “colonialism and repression” throughout history. They utilize their own sociopolitical awareness about the history of relationships between schools and communities of color to better understand how to overcome the barriers to authentic connection with their African American and Latina/o students.

CRRS educators of African American and Latino male students also support the development of authentic and trusting relationships among their students. For example, Jackson and colleagues (2014) describe the pedagogical practices of Craig, a mentor at an all-male, in-school mentoring program at an alternative high school in New York City who helps to foster “reciprocal love,” a deeply rooted interest in and concern for the community, among his Black and Latino male students. During group sessions, Craig could be heard reminding the group, “there are no excuses for any of you failing. Geno, if you and Jonny are in the same class and you’re passing, then he shouldn’t be failing. Remember fellas, you are your brother’s keeper” (p. 405). Such rhetoric was indicative of Craig’s belief that all students are responsible for one another and that students could trust that their brothers would hold them accountable inside and outside of the classroom. This notion of care disrupts unidirectional notions of connectedness in which the only
classroom relation of importance is that between teacher and student and emphasizes how CRRS educators foster the value of interdependence within their classrooms.

**CRRS Practices for Latina/o Secondary Students**

The findings of research that has exclusively focused on practices of CRRS teachers of Latina/o secondary students do not differ drastically from those of African American and Latina/o students described above. They too reveal that successful teaching for Latina/o secondary students supports students’ academic achievement, fosters their cultural and linguistic competence and dexterity, further develops students’ sociopolitical awareness, and demonstrates authentic care. They have, however, offered further nuance by suggesting that CRRS teachers of Latina/o secondary students also 1) balance expectations of academic excellence with sensitivity to Latina/o linguistically marginalized youth’s unique needs; 2) support students’ multilingual and multicultural identities by drawing on students’ home-language and cultural practices; 3) deliberately seek out opportunities to enhance their knowledge of Latina/o secondary students’ communities; and 4) draw specific attention to the ways in which Latinas/os are positioned in American society, described below.

**Balancing expectations with sensitivity.** The extant literature that exclusively focuses on CRRS practices for Latina/o secondary students highlights the flexibility required of teachers who seek to challenge students while trying to meet the unique needs of Latina/o linguistically marginalized youth (Sosa & Gomez, 2012). For example, Ms. Ellis, a focal teacher in Sosa and Gomez’s (2012) qualitative study of 10 highly efficacious teachers of Latina/o students in a large Midwestern city explains:
I have a student who does not want to do oral presentations and that’s a very common thing with language learners. So I will give them an option: instead of doing it in front of the whole class, come after school and do it in front of a small group. Trying to find ways to meet their needs but still have expectations of them, still challenge them, not just saying, ‘Oh poor you; you don’t have to do this.’ (p. 897)

Ms. Ellis’s response highlights how CRRS educators meet Latina/o linguistically marginalized high school students’ needs without lowering their standards. “Being flexible,” Sosa and Gomez contend, “does not mean that teachers let go of their expectations regarding assignments and homework” (p. 888). In contrast, the practices of CRRS teachers of Latina/o secondary students braid together high expectations and teacher support designed to help students to meet the academic demands of high school in preparation for postsecondary education and later life.

**Supporting students’ multicultural and multilingual identities.** The extant literature that exclusively focuses on CRRS practices for Latina/o secondary students also suggests that CRRS educators not only develop Latina/o students’ cultural and linguistic competence, but also explicitly support students’ multicultural and multilingual identities (Bucholtz, Casillas, & Lee, 2017; Feger, 2006; Irizarry, 2007, 2011, 2017; Irizarry & Antrop-González, 2007; Irizarry & Raible, 2011; Sheets, 1995; Wortham & Contreras, 2002). For example, Irizarry's (2011) study of how Latina/o youth experienced an Action Research and Social Change class at their high school led by the author details how he and his Latina/o students created an environment in which code-meshing (Young & Martinez, 2011) or “moving effortlessly within and across languages, often drawing from multiple languages to maximize meaning-making” (Irizarry, 2017, p. 87) was not only accepted, but also encouraged. In contrast to other classrooms within the high school in which Dominant American English was the only approved language of communication,
students in Irizarry's classroom moved fluidly between and among languages including Dominant American English, Spanish, and African American English within a given class period. In his recent explication of this study, Irizarry (2017) reflects on the impact of such a classroom climate and pedagogical approach. He writes:

Because of the restrictive language policies subordinating the use of languages other than Dominant American English in the school, the students often felt alienated from teachers and the content they needed to learn in order to meet their personal and educational goals. In addition to academic benefits associated with increased engagement and using diverse languages to promote a deeper understanding of material through connection to their everyday lives, code-meshing in this context also allowed for the affirmation of the hybrid identities students had developed as a result of interactions with peers across lines of cultural, racial, ethnic, and linguistic difference. (pp. 87-88)

By not merely “tolerating,” but instead embracing students' complex and “hybrid” linguistic identities, Irizarry enabled his Latina/o students to see their multilingualism as an asset in academic settings. In Irizarry's classroom, no language was privileged or prioritized at the expense of another. Instead, students were able to evaluate, for themselves, what language or combination of languages was contextually best to convey a given meaning. Irizarry reports that this encouragement of flexible language use had both personal and academic benefits for the Latina/o youth in his care including “increased engagement” and “deeper understanding” of course material as well as a feeling of “affirmation” and connectedness to their teacher. As evident in Irizarry's attention to the utility of leveraging the diverse linguistic abilities that Latina/o youth bring into the classroom, CRRS practices that develop Latina/o secondary students' cultural and linguistic dexterity sustain Latina/o secondary “students and their sense of selves” (p. 88).
**Seeking connections with Latina/o communities.** Existing scholarship on CCRSP practices and Latina/o secondary students also suggests that in order to support students’ educational potential, CRRS educators of Latina/o high school students seize opportunities to gain knowledge about the communities of which these young people are a vital part (Irizarry & Antrop-González, 2007; Irizarry & Raible, 2011). Irizarry and Raible’s (2011) study of successful teachers of Latina/o secondary students highlights the deliberate steps CRRS teachers take “to seek experiences that enhance their personal and professional relation to Latino students” (p. 196). As Mario Cummings, one exemplary teacher in Irizarry and Raible’s study, explains:

> It’s important to try to tap into the students and figure out who they were and talk to their parents and visit them in positive ways, ‘not your son and daughter is in trouble.’ Then you get kind of invited to social events, quinceneras and things in the community…A large part is just listening to them and asking questions and talking with them, going into the neighborhood and visiting, and talking with people at [a local community-based organization]. (p. 196)

Through authentic dialogue and demonstrated interest in Latina/o students’ communities, CRRS educators are able to “tap into” their students’ worlds. In doing so, educators are able to derive invaluable “barrio-based” insight that can assist them in developing and sustaining Latina/o secondary students’ cultural and linguistic competencies as well as supporting students’ in moving between the multiple worlds in which they live.

**Drawing attention to how Latina/o students are positioned in America.**

Finally, CRRS educators of Latina/o secondary students support students in examining the lenses through which Latinas/os are viewed in American society (Cammarota & Romero, 2006; Feger, 2006; Rubin, 2014). For example, Rubin (2014), in his study of CRRSP practices for Latina/o students in a secondary literacy classroom, details a project in which his students discuss Charles Raimirez Berg’s (2002) six main Latina/o
stereotypes— the *bandido*, the harlot, the male buffoon, the female clos, the Latin lover, and the dark Lady— and engage in commercial analysis of current media. “I ask the students to reflect upon what they have seen and read in class,” Rubin explains, “in order to come to a new understanding about racism on television as well as a new perspective about Latinos/as and their place in American society” (p. 227). By engaging students in close examinations of the ways in which Latina/o identities are negatively constructed in the media, Rubin asks them to investigate the socially and culturally constructed nature of knowledge. Caraballo (2017) argues that such pedagogical practices not only support the development of students’ emergent critical consciousness, but also support their “leveraging of literacies and discourses in academic contexts and beyond” (p. 6). In this way, they support students in reading both the world and the word (Freire, 1993/1970).

**Summary**

The literature reviewed in Section Two has provided concrete examples of successful practices for teaching Black and Latina/o students and the perspectives of CRRS educators on these successful practices. In these studies, it is evident that successful teachers of both Black and Latina/o students support students’ academic achievement, foster their cultural and linguistic competence and dexterity, further develop students’ sociopolitical awareness, and demonstrate authentic care. Scholarship that has focused exclusively on the educational experiences of Latina/o secondary students has also foregrounded the means by which CRRS educators both expect excellence and sensitively support the needs of Latina/o linguistically marginalized youth, actively attempt to form deeper personal and professional relationships with the Latina/o
community, and focus on how Latina/o students are specifically positioned in American society. Given the disproportionate underachievement of Latino male secondary students described in Chapter I, I argue that it is imperative to further identify, describe, and analyze successful teaching practices for educating Latino male secondary students. While documenting the practices and perspectives of CRRS educators of Black and Latina/o students, as detailed in Section Two above, is critical in this effort, I argue that we must also attend to the perspectives of Latino male secondary students themselves if we are to develop a more meaningful portrait of successful teaching for these young men. Accordingly, in Section Three below, I will outline the theoretical perspectives and critiques relevant to including such voice in scholarship on CRRSP before highlighting the existing research on teaching and learning that centers the voices of Latina/o secondary students broadly and Latino male secondary students specifically.

Section Three: Student Voice

Since its emergence in the 1990s and early 2000s, educational scholarship centering student voice has proliferated (Cook-Sather, 2014). In this study, as in the literature, student voice is both a reference to the literal sound of students’ words, but also to students having a legitimized presence in the discussion, implementation, and reformation of educational practices and policies that most deeply affect them (Cook-Sather, 2006). Cook-Sather (2002) articulates several viewpoints on the appropriateness and value of student voice in research on teaching and learning. Relevant to this study are the perspectives of constructivists and critical pedagogues. As was discussed in Chapter I, from a constructivist perspective, students actively construct their own understandings.
Accordingly, in order to understand how to change pedagogical practice so that it better facilitates student learning, constructivists contend that we must attend to students’ own assessments of their learning processes and experiences. From a critical perspective, the inclusion of student voice in discussions about pedagogical practice is part of a “commitment towards redistributing power not only within the classroom between teachers and students, but in society at large” (Cook-Sather, 2002, p. 6). Since the learning process is negotiated between teacher and student, both parties should have a voice in dialogue about its improvement. As a critical constructivist, I borrow from both of these perspectives and argue that the inclusion of student voice complements and extends the theory of CRRSP by redistributing power in the discussion on what constitutes successful teaching practice through highlighting how students make sense of their educational experiences and assess the pedagogy in practice in their classrooms.

It is important to note, however, that advocating for attention to student voice does not suggest that these are the only perspectives to consider when discussing urban school reform or that efforts to include student voice are not without potential pitfalls. To that end, some postmodern and poststructuralist feminists rightly caution against attempts to authorize student voice without acknowledging the complicated classroom power dynamics that problematize such an act. Ellsworth (1992), for example, argues that “every expression of student voice [is] partial and predicated on the absence and marginalization of alternative voices” (p. 103). Some scholars within the constructivist and critical traditions also acknowledge this partiality of student voice. As Nieto (1994) explains, “Nobody has all the answers and suggesting that students’ views should be adopted wholesale is to accept a romantic view of students that is just as partial and
condescending as excluding them completely from the discussion” (p. 398). With these critiques in mind, I advocate for attention to student voice in tandem with attention to the voice of their educators. It is in the dialogical relationship between these two parties, I contend, that successful teaching and learning takes place. Therefore, the perspectives of both students and teachers must be under consideration if successful teaching is to be better understood.

**Centering Student Voice in Research on Teaching and Learning**

Much of the literature on teaching and learning in urban contexts that centers student voice highlights the voices of African American students alone or together with Latina/o students. This research has particularly foregrounded the role of academic achievement and authentic care in students’ conceptions of successful teaching and has highlighted how these students see the interconnectedness between these two tenets (Freeman, 1997; Howard, 2001b, 2002, 2003; Hubert, 2014; Jackson et al., 2014; Knight-Diop, 2010; Knight & Marciano, 2013; Rodriguez, 2008; Watson et al., 2016; Wyngaard, 2007). For example, the voices of African American second through eighth grade students in both Howard’s 2001 study of student perspectives on culturally relevant pedagogy and his 2002 study of student perspectives on school and teaching highlighted how successful teachers authentically care for students by placing a high value on student learning. To illustrate, Gregory, a focal student, offered this description of why he believes his teacher Dorothy is successful with African American students:

> She tells us every day [that] she cares, and she puts a lot more effort into the kids who don’t want to do it [learn]. She tries to help everybody. She tries to make sure kids get the right idea of what they should be learning. Because a teacher who cares makes sure that the kids learn instead of going to school to play, and school is supposed to be about learning. (Howard, 2002, p. 434)
For Gregory, successful teaching is care-full teaching. Importantly, this type of care is not just expressed in pats on the back, actions that Gay (2000) associates with *caring about* ethnically diverse students, but is instead demonstrated by an insistence on the value of learning and support to help all students succeed. This is what Gay calls *caring for*. It is through such care, Howard contends, that African American students are motivated to achieve.

The voices of Black high school students in Knight-Diop’s (2010) exploration of how interpersonal and institutional structures in a high school focused on college preparation facilitate or hinder Black students’ academic achievement, engagement, and access to college, echo this insistence on learning. According to students under study, successful teachers demonstrate high academic expectations by believing that all students are college-bound and designing challenging coursework that will prepare students for college and beyond. Tenisha, a student participant describes one such teacher:

> I have a few teachers who teach really well. Mr. Poppin, the English teacher, likes to teach the class 'cause we have a lot of potential to advance to college…and he talks about college, because he wants everybody to go to college. He makes you read a lot. He breaks things down, like when you read a book and you don’t get it, because his books were boring, but they have a lot of morals to them. So he’d have to show you a different perspective of life and all of that. (pp. 163-164)

For Tenisha, Mr. Poppin’s success can be attributed to his belief in students’ potential as well as to his focus on rigor and support. Such practices prepared students like Tenisha for high school completion and postsecondary success.

In Howard’s (2003) study of African American high school students’ perceptions of their academic identities, Ahmed, a student, describes the impact that such high expectations have on the development of his academic identity:
This year for pre-calculus, I have Mrs. Lord, who is White. She just tells us all the time how smart we are, and she really makes us feel special about what we are learning. If we cannot figure a problem out, she will continue to push us to think harder, analyze the properties, and talk out loud about how we are trying to process. Sometimes I come out of her class feeling like I learned so much information!! I think it’s because she believes in all of her students, we start believing in ourselves. I know that we are high school students and stuff, but it’s still good for us to hear positive stuff about what we can do. (p. 11)

For Ahmed, Mrs. Lord demonstrates authentic care not only by expressing “positive stuff” about what her students can do and making them “feel special,” but also actively working through academic challenges with students. In doing so, when Ahmed leaves the classroom, he feels the excitement and satisfaction that comes with learning and begins to start to believe in himself. This is one of the many powerful products of authentic care.

**Latina/o Secondary Student Voice in Research on Teaching and Learning**

Research on teaching and learning that exclusively centers the voices of Latina/o secondary students also highlights the importance of authentic care and how it is demonstrated through attention to the other CRRSP tenets of academic achievement, cultural and linguistic competence and dexterity, and sociopolitical awareness. In particular, the literature centering Latina/o secondary student voice reveals that successful teaching for Latina/o students 1) supports students’ academic success through providing academic assistance inside and outside of the classroom setting; 2) affirms students’ cultural and linguistic identities; and 3) creates safe spaces grounded in respect that allow students to act on their emergent sociopolitical awareness.

**Providing academic assistance.** Like the research that centers the voices of African American and Latina/o students, the extant research exclusively featuring the voices of Latina/o high school students reveals that successful teaching is that which
supports academic success (Flores-González, 2002; Garrett, Barr, & Rotham, 2009; Garza, 2009; Sands, Guzman, Stephens, & Boggs, 2007). For example, Garret, Barr, & Rothman (2009) draw upon the perspectives of 46 Latina/o ninth grade students from one large, ethnically diverse, urban central New Jersey public school district to define caring teacher practice. In doing so, these scholars find that these Latina/o students value a teacher’s willingness to provide academic support, including informing students how they are doing or what they need to do to succeed or improve, monitoring student progress, and pushing students to do well. These attributes of successful teaching are confirmed by Garza’s (2009) study of 9 male Latino students and 24 female Latina students’ perceptions of teacher care in a high school Spanish classroom in a large suburban school. In particular, students in Garza’s study identify care in teachers’ pedagogical moves including utilizing appropriate scaffolds during a teaching episode, providing general academic support in the classroom setting, and always being available to the student for assistance.

The comments from participants in Flores-González’s (2003) study of the identity development of 33 Latina/o students attending a Chicago high school reflect the impact of the academic support cited above. Marta, a focal student, describes the critical influence of several teachers and counselors who challenged her to live up to her potential:

My freshman year I was doing real good and my division [home room] teacher was like, ‘You’ve got to get into honors classes. That’s really good for you.’ I was like, ‘No, ‘cause I’m gonna mess up.’ So sophomore year, my other division teacher was like, ‘You gotta get in, you gotta get in.’ So when I went to pick my classes for junior year, my counselor was like, ‘You wanna get in?’ I’m like, ‘Man, everybody is telling me about it, but I don’t want to ‘cause I’m gonna mess up.’ And she said, ‘No, with your brain and your intelligence and your accurateness and everything.
You’re not gonna mess up if you put your head set on it.’ So she got me in, and that’s how it started. (p. 93)

Like Gregory in Howard’s (2001b, 2002) studies of African American students’ perspectives of effective educators, for Marta, successful teaching is that which sets high expectations and provides the emotional scaffolding and encouragement that allows students to meet their academic goals. It is through such practices that students are motivated to challenge themselves in ways that prepare students for high school completion as well as admission to and success in postsecondary education.

**Affirming students’ cultural and linguistic identities.** In addition to supporting students’ academic achievement, scholarship centering the voices of Latina/o high school students reveals that Latina/o students see successful teaching as that which promotes students’ cultural dexterity by affirming students cultural and linguistic identities (Irizarry, 2007, 2017; Quiroz, 2001; Valenzuela, 1999). For example, a Mexican-American ninth grade male student in Valenzuela’s (1999) seminal study of U.S.-Mexican youth in a Texas high school, shares this about Ms. Aranda, a beloved social studies teacher described in Section Two above:

Like I like the way Ms. Aranda is nice to the ESL students. It’s like they just got here and they need special help. They got to do some stuff [assignments] in Spanish and we all learned. It’s nice to see your language be part of your learning. It’s like wow! That’s me, my culture, my language…She’s gente [good people]! (p. 102)

Ms. Asada’s pedagogy affirms students’ cultural and linguistic identity—treating students’ as “learners who already know a great deal and who have experiences, concepts, and languages that can be built on and expanded to help them learn even more” (Villegas & Lucas, 2002, p. 23). In doing so, she moves beyond surface expressions of warmth and belonging, and instead authentically cares for Latina/o students by sustaining students’
cultures and leveraging student’s “funds of knowledge” (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992) in the classroom.

In the absence of such care, Latina/o secondary students are left feeling disconnected from schooling. To illustrate, Quiroz’s (2001) study of the school narratives of 27 Puerto Rican and Mexican students, written first in eighth grade and then again in eleventh grade, provide snapshots of students’ views of family, school, ethnicity, and future plans. In particular, the narratives of eleventh grade students reveal their feelings of resentment and anger at a school system and, in particular, teachers, who they feel do not authentically care for them. As one student explains, “They [teachers] ignore students. They treat us Hispanics different than they treat White people. They would rather deal with White people. And one teacher, he will just tell it to you. It makes me so mad, but what can we do?” (p. 332). In contrast to Ms. Asada’s student who feels cared for as an individual and cultural being, this Latina/o student feels ignored and other-ed by those who are supposed to guide him. He expresses feelings of anger and paralysis as a result of the lack of support for his academic and cultural identities.

Creating safe havens. The existing research on Latina/o secondary students’ perceptions of successful teaching also offers powerful descriptions of how successful teachers create the conditions necessary for the development of students’ sociopolitical awareness (Diaz-Greenberg, 2003; Zanger, 1994). To illustrate, Diaz-Greenberg’s (2003) qualitative study of 18 Latina/o high school students from a Spanish for Native Speakers program in Florida explores how these youth make sense of their cultural and linguistic realities, what factors these students feel contribute to the silencing of voice in Latina/o high school students, and their suggestions for how to legitimize such voices within
educational reform. The students in Diaz-Greenberg’s qualitative activist research reveal that successful teachers create a “safe haven where students felt a sense of freedom of expression” (p. 83). Educators create such a space through the development of mutual trust, reciprocity, and respect. Ryan, a student participant, describes one such community:

In this class, I have a voice. I am allowed to express my ideas and opinions. It’s like a whole different world. A world where my voice matters, and my opinions really count, because there is a key, the key to unlock everyone’s voice. Even though some people are afraid of this key, my teacher inspires us with her ways of teaching, she encourages us to unlock that voice and share it with the world. (p. 84)

Within this teacher’s classroom walls, Ryan feels secure and as a result, empowered to share his suggestions for a more equitable and pluralistic educational environment. In particular, students under study suggest not only changes to curriculum, texts, and physical facilities, but also advocate for a change in pedagogical approaches. In lieu of “banking education” (Freire, 1993/1970), students champion teaching that “would rupture the structured silences imposed on their history, culture, and language” (p. 85). In doing so, Diaz-Greenberg’s student participants offer a picture of the necessary conditions for the growth of students’ sociopolitical awareness.

In contrast to the safe havens described above, Zanger’s (1994) study of the perspectives of twenty high-achieving, Spanish-speaking Latina/os from a Boston high school reveals students’ experiences of marginalization fueled by a lack of cultural respect and a breakdown in student-teacher trust. Students’ describe a dehumanizing context in which they do not feel comfortable being themselves because of teachers’ overt and explicit racist attitudes. In a disturbing illustration, a Puerto Rican male student under study states that a teacher “called me a spic right in the class” (p. 186). Responding to such egregious lack of care, Ana, a focal student, explains, “we like people to think of
us as human beings” (p. 179). Such classroom climates are fodder for feelings of inadequacy, not empowerment.

**Latino Male Secondary Student Voice in Research on Teaching and Learning**

In reviewing the extant literature on teaching and learning in urban contexts, the voices of Latino male secondary students are underrepresented. As Halx and Ortiz (2011) argue:

> Although much research exists that explores Latino student educational achievement from multiple perspectives, the literature is lacking with regard to the individual Latino male student’s perspective of his own educational circumstance. These studies have focused primarily on inputs and end results, largely ignoring what happens in the middle—the place where students come to terms with their own meanings and definitions for school. (p. 422)

While a dearth of empirical studies exist that exclusively document the perspectives of Latino male students, the work of Halx and Ortiz (2011) and Garrett, Antrop-González, and Vélez (2010) are notable exceptions. Acknowledging the current underachievement of Latino male high school students across the country, these scholars have sought to better understand Latino male secondary students’ resiliency—why some Latino males are able to successfully complete high school, while others are not. To do so, Halx and Ortiz conducted a qualitative study at two south Texas high schools with twelve participants who were over 18 years of age and who had dropped out or who were in credit recovery while Garrett and colleagues conducted a qualitative study of what factors three working-class Puerto Rican male high school students attribute to their high academic achievement. The comments of interviewed participants in both studies reveal “a clear and unsatisfied hunger for authentic relationships, personal communications, or even just simple conversation from school personnel” (Halx & Ortiz, 2011, p. 426). For
example, Jose, a participant in Halx and Ortiz’s study explains how he is motivated by teachers with whom he feels this connection and disempowered by those who he feels do not recognize his humanity. Speaking about a teacher who expressed a personal interest in him, Jose explains, “Mr. Ramos is actually here for the students.” (p. 433). Jordán, a Puerto Rican male youth in Garrett, Antrop-González, and Vélez’s (2010) study, echoed these sentiments when he offered the following description of a caring teacher: “Someone who likes to teach, some of the teachers here act like they don’t…like they’re here for the money. They don’t really care about teaching students” (p. 111). For Latino male secondary students, such acts of respect and interest are vital demonstrations of authentic care.

In addition to human connection, the findings of Halx and Ortiz’s (2011) study reveal the notable work and achievement ethic of Latino male students, some of whom work multiple jobs outside of school, and the value Latino male students place in educators and educational settings that can “tap the work and achievement ethic of these students and, with it, build an academic study ethic” (p. 431). Successful teachers are not those with deficit views who assume that students who drop out or who struggle in school are “most likely just lazy individuals who have no goals for their futures” (p. 431). Instead, they are those who can motivate these individuals to understand the value of educational achievement. As Jose explains:

I think that the things that are keeping people out of school is...how can I say it?...their way of seeing life...In our culture, like, school is not the main thing. The main thing for most of our culture is work, making money, making things. We sometimes make school the second...second...how I say it...a second priority, but trust me a lot of people in our culture want to keep up on school; we want to improve our way of life. (pp. 431-432)
Successful educators are those that can harness this desire for self-improvement to help Latino males to make the connection between academic pursuits and future goals. Such efforts support Latino male students in improving their academic achievement and life circumstances.

More recently, Halx (2014) has further investigated the potential value of critical pedagogy for these Latino male students who have disengaged from high school. In his study of eight Mexican American male students at three predominately low-SES population high schools, Halx attempts to examine, from the student perspective, whether Latino male students would be receptive to critical pedagogical approaches within their classrooms. Findings suggest that current classrooms do not offer the conditions necessary for the development of students’ sociopolitical awareness. They are not often “safe havens,” as Diaz-Greenberg’s (2003) students described. Accordingly, students possess, “only a surface awareness of their place in the world” (p. 266) and are resigned to accept their current education—an education in which Alejandro, a student, explains, “Some teachers…just give us work, and not teach us anything…most of them, they just teach, and if we understand it, we do, and if we don’t, we don’t” (p. 264). In conclusion, Halx posits that critical pedagogical approaches such as problem-posing (Freire, 1993/1970) may provide powerful conduits for students to develop the sociopolitical awareness necessary to challenge a system that has failed them and to demand an educational experience of interest and value.
Summary

Scholarship on student voice operates from the belief that students should have a say in the educational matters that intimately affect them. The research on teaching and learning that centers student voice has offered additional information about what youth of color believe are successful teaching practices and the impact that those practices have on their educational experiences. In particular, studies centering the voices of African American and Latina/o students have highlighted the importance of the CRRSP tenets of academic achievement and authentic care. The literature that specifically centers the voices of Latina/o secondary students further suggests that for Latina/o youth, successful teaching must also support students’ cultural and linguistic identities and create spaces within schools where Latina/o students feel that they can speak about what is on their minds and in their hearts. Finally, the literature that exclusively centers the voices of Latino male secondary students pushes scholars, educators, and policymakers to consider how authentically caring relationships may be particularly important for Latino young men who often are viewed as deficient of the qualities needed to succeed in schools and how schools and school actors can draw upon Latino male students' multiple identities, including their identities as workers within the community, and better support the further development of their sociopolitical awareness. While this work, when paired with that which features the practices and perspectives of CRRS educators in Section Two, offers a more comprehensive picture of successful teaching for Latino male students in urban areas, I argue that further research is needed that centers the voices of Latino male students specifically. Without such research, educational reform aimed at meeting their needs will miss the perspectives of those who “experience daily the effects of existing
educational policies in practice” (Cook-Sather, 2002, p. 3). With this in mind, this study provides an opportunity for Latino male high school students along with their teachers to contribute to the discussion on what constitutes successful teaching practice for Latino male students. Through this work, successful pedagogy like CRRSP can be better tailored to meet the specific needs of these young men.
Chapter III

METHODOLOGY

Overall Research Design

This study’s research design is a qualitative study that utilizes portraiture methodology to explore successful teaching practice for Latino male secondary students in one New York City public high school. Aligned with a critical constructivist framework, the study operates from the beliefs that classrooms are socially and culturally organized and that teaching and learning is a reciprocal, dialogic process that involves meaning-making on the part of both teachers and students (Erickson, 1986). Accordingly, the methodology used to capture the essence of successful teaching practices must operate from the assumption that understanding human, cultural, and social phenomena is an interpretive act that requires attention to multiple perspectives. Accordingly, qualitative inquiry’s goal of understanding how individuals make sense of their world and the experiences they have in world (Merriam, 1998) seems a fitting methodological approach to answer the following two research questions:

1. What are the practices of three White male teachers in one New York City public high school that their Latino male students identify as successful in supporting their educational potential?

   a. In what ways, if at all, do the identified practices support these Latino male students’ academic achievement?
b. In what ways, if at all, do the identified practices foster these Latino male students’ cultural and linguistic competence and dexterity?

c. In what ways, if at all, do the identified practices further develop these Latino male students’ sociopolitical awareness?

d. In what ways, if at all, do the identified practices embody authentic care?

2. How do these three teachers make sense of these identified practices and their success with Latino male secondary students?

a. In what ways, if at all, do these teachers address supporting their Latino male students’ academic achievement?

b. In what ways, if at all, do these teachers address fostering their Latino male students’ cultural and linguistic competence and dexterity?

c. In what ways, if at all, do these teachers address further developing their Latino male students’ sociopolitical awareness?

d. In what ways, if at all, do these teachers address caring in authentic ways?

**Portraiture Methodology**

Social science portraiture, a qualitative methodology first introduced by Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot (1983) that balances aesthetics and empiricism, was selected as the methodology for this study because of its ability to “help us hear the stories of our students and our fellow teachers, a music of being missing from many of our schools and most of our discussions of teaching” (Featherstone, 1989, p. 378). Rooted in the phenomenological tradition, portraiture features a blend of humanistic sensibilities and scientific rigor that is designed to capture the nuance of human experience. Portraiture’s uniqueness and appropriateness for this study is best exemplified by its search for
goodness, its reach beyond the academy, and its status as a vehicle for voice and transformation outlined below.

**Search for goodness.** Created in response to flat and sterilized depictions of school success and failure in academic and popular discourse, portraiture explores “goodness” as defined by participants in a specific context (Gaztambibe-Fernández, Cairns, Kawashima, Menna, & VanderDussen., 2011, p. 4). Importantly, for the portraitist, what is ‘good’ is not void of imperfection or contradiction. Instead, “goodness” is identified in the ways that “subjects meet, negotiate, and overcome challenges” (Dixson, Chapman, & Hill, 2005, p. 18). It is this attention to the “coexistence of strengths and vulnerabilities” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 8) in any individual or institution that make it a viable methodology for the exploration of promise and potential in the practice of urban secondary teachers of Latino male youth.

**Reach beyond the academy.** Portraiture is an appropriate medium not only for those seeking to pursue goodness, but also for those who seek to produce systematic and methodologically rigorous scholarship that is also appealing and accessible to practitioners in the field. In lieu of exclusive and esoteric language, portraitists utilize narrative to frame stories that facilitate dialogue in and between the realms of theory, policy, and practice. For example, research studies that have utilized portraiture have examined a wide variety of educational phenomena including the experiences of three preservice teachers of color as they attempted to deconstruct deficit assumptions in the narratives told about bilingual learners (Fránquiz, Salazar, & DeNicolo, 2011), the experiences of a veteran White teacher of English in a recently desegregated school district (Chapman, 2005), the experiences of seven pre-service teachers as they attempt to reflect on
constructs of identity and belonging in a university-based teacher preparation program (Cacciattolo & Gilmore, 2016), and the experiences of Black women educators at three higher education institutions (Hill, 2005), Particularly relevant to this study are Gregory Michie’s (2005) See You When We Get There: Teaching for Change in Urban Schools which examined the practice of five teachers of color in an urban school district, Lynn’s (2006) study of the practices of three exemplary Black male teachers in urban schools in California, Quigley and colleague’s (2015) study of the practices of two science teachers, one in an elementary school and one in a middle school, and Warren-Grice's (2017) recent portraits of five Black educators who utilize culturally relevant pedagogy to advocate for students of color in predominately White, suburban high schools. Michie’s, Lynn’s, Quigley and colleague’s’, and Warren-Grice's detailed and nuanced portraits capture successful dimensions of classroom practice in action, the teachers’ intention behind the practices, and the role of context. In doing so, these works as well as the work of other scholars who utilize portraiture, invite a broad and eclectic audience into new and existing dialogues about the state of education. This ability to motivate a more inclusive audience is particularly useful for this study that seeks to serve as a catalyst for change in urban public high schools.

**Vehicle for voice and social transformation.** Finally, aligned with the critical constructivist framework that is operationalized in this study that centers sources of subjugated knowledge and meaning-making often left out of academic discourse (Kincheloe, 2005), portraiture is a vehicle for voice for those who rarely are included in conversations about schooling (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1983). In portraiture, Featherstone (1989) writes, “we hear the sound of a human voice making sense of other voices,
especially those not often heard, voices of women and of people of color…” (p. 375). It is a methodology that embraces the perspectives of those who are marginalized and takes their voices seriously (Featherstone, 1989). In a study seeking to render visible teaching in urban schools in ways that embrace the perspectives of those often left out, specifically Latino male students, as well as their teachers, portraiture’s intentional inclusion of the voice on the margin is particularly apt.

Pilot Study

A pilot study of this research project was conducted in the Spring of 2015. The initial study design was constructed from a hermeneutic phenomenological framework influenced by the work of Max Van Manen (1990) and sought to understand what constituted successful teaching for three 11th grade Latino male secondary students at Hilltop High School, a small, public high school in the Bronx, New York. The sample of three young men were identified by the administration as Latino male youth who could benefit from participation in an after-school extracurricular interest group facilitated by the author on education and Latino male secondary students. Students met with the author one hour a week for fourteen weeks to discuss issues such as existing national patterns of Latino male academic underachievement, stereotypes of Latino male students and their impact on students’ educational experiences, and successful teaching practices for Latino male youth. In addition to these discussions, student participants engaged in a series of ten semi-structured mini qualitative focus group interviews (Flores & Alonzo, 1995; Morgan, 1997) of 30-50 minutes each. Interview protocols were developed utilizing Spradley’s (1979) framework in order to ensure multiple types of descriptive
ethnographic questions and were informed by the literature review on culturally relevant, responsive, and sustaining pedagogies and student voice. These “ritualized conversations” (Goodall, 2000) provided an opportunity for student participants to construct meaning around what constitutes successful teaching practice for Latino male secondary students.

Preliminary findings from the pilot study suggest that the three 11th grade Latino male secondary students at Hilltop High School could easily identify teachers who they believed were successful in supporting their educational potential. In particular, data indicated that successful teachers of these three Latino male students: 1) investigated students’ interests and sought to make connections between these interests and academic content, particularly when they saw students become disengaged from schooling; 2) developed trusting relationships with students by opening up about their own personal struggles as well as honestly inquiring about students’ feelings; and 3) reminded students of their potential when they failed to meet expectations and reiterated their unwavering belief in students’ abilities. These findings provide further evidence that successful teaching for Latino male students supports students’ academic achievement (Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995a, 1995b) and demonstrates authentic care (Gay, 2000; Valenzuela, 1999). Such practices play an important role in re-engaging Latino male secondary students with school when they face academic and personal struggles. Students indicated that successful teachers are those who do not label students as failures when they face momentary lapses in engagement or experience academic difficulty. Instead, successful teachers utilize these moments as opportunities to reaffirm and deepen their relationships with Latino male secondary students and to support these students in reaching their
potential. These findings contribute to our understanding of the unconditional nature of authentic care and its role in supporting student’s academic, social, and emotional growth.

While the pilot study offered important insight into how three Latino male secondary students conceptualized and experienced successful teaching practices, I found myself questioning in my analytic memos both the intention of the identified teachers and hypothesizing about what these identified practices looked like when enacted in the classroom. I quickly realized that though the initial study design was sound in that it allowed me to explore how Latino male secondary students make sense of successful teaching, it would neither provide insight into teacher intention behind successful practices nor would it concretize practice through actual observation. It was at this time that I decided to revise my research design in order to include the perspectives of both teachers and students as well as observations of the identified practices in action. In conceptualizing this new version of the study where I moved away from a sole focus on students to the dialogic interaction between teacher and student, critical constructivism emerged as a more useful and appropriate overarching framework. In addition, portraiture methodology emerged as a means of capturing the dynamic interactions of classroom life because of its attention to goodness, its reach beyond the academy, and its interest in voice, as described above. This revised study retained the pilot study’s initial desire to attend to the perspectives of those who are often marginalized in discussions of teaching and learning— Latino male secondary students— but importantly places these critical voices in conversation with those with whom they seek to learn— their teachers. In doing so, I argue that this study offers a more comprehensive description of successful teaching for Latino male secondary students in urban areas. I outline the research design’s five
overarching categories: 1) context; 2) voice; 3) relationship; 4) emergent themes; and 5) the aesthetic whole, below (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997).

**Context: Research Site**

According to both critical constructivists and portraitists, human experience and organizational culture are framed and shaped by context. Defined as the setting within which a phenomenon takes place, context becomes “the framework, the reference point, the map, the ecological sphere” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 41) that not only identifies the physical, geographic, historical, and temporal moment, but also serves as a resource for understanding what individuals say and do. Given the importance of context, the selection of the study’s research site at Hilltop High School in the Bronx, New York, the same site in which the pilot study was conducted, impacts all other areas of data collection and analysis.

**New York City**

While large disparities exist nationally between the high school graduation rates of Latino young men and their White and Asian classmates, this crisis is particularly acute in New York City where Latino male students are two times more likely not to graduate from high school than their White and Asian classmates (New York City Office of the Mayor, 2011). These statistics are compounded by the fact the New York City Department of Education (NYC DOE) is the largest school system in the United States, educating 576,880 male students and 453,172 Hispanic students in 2014-2015 (New York City Department of Education, 2015). Furthermore, the Latina/o population is New York City is one of the most diverse of any of the large metropolitan concentrations
While the majority of Latinas/os in the United States are individuals of Mexican origin, Puerto Ricans are the largest group in the New York area, making up 31% of all Latinas/os followed closely by Dominicans, who make up 25% (Bergard, 2011). In addition, while the majority of the Latina/o population in the United States is native-born (United States Census Bureau, 2008), New York City has experienced an influx in new immigrants in the past three decades, particularly by individuals of Equadorian, and Mexican decent (Bergard, 2011; Cortina, de la Cruz, & Makar, 2012). A significant portion of those who have migrated from Latin America and the Spanish-speaking Caribbean come from low-income families, have low educational attainment, and have little to no knowledge of the English language (Bergard, 2011; Cortina et al., 2012). In response to the underachievement of all Latino male youth in its schools, the New York City Department of Education has become one of the main sites of reform efforts seeking to improve outcomes for Latino male students such as the Young Men’s Initiative (YMI) enacted under the Bloomberg Administration (New York City Office of the Mayor) discussed in Chapter I. These demographic and political realities make it a relevant context for study.

Hilltop High School

As a former teacher in a New York City public high school, I had intimate knowledge of, access to, and contact with Latina/o secondary students and their teachers. Accordingly, my former place of employment, Hilltop High School, a small, college-preparatory, public high school served as the research site for this study. While this selection of site is convenient (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007), it is also intentional. In the 2015-2016 school year, Hilltop had an enrollment of 443 students, 412 of whom receive
Free or Reduced Priced Lunch, 219 of whom identify as male, and 272 of whom identify as Hispanic, representing 61% of the total school population. Together, the work of faculty and students led to a 2015 4-year graduation rate of 92%, 20 percentage points above the city average. 80% of these graduates enrolled in college or another postsecondary program within 6 months, 25 percentage points above the district average. The school also received an A on its district’s report card. Finally, the pilot study conducted with three Latino male high school students from Hilltop High School in the spring of 2015 suggested that there were faculty members within Hilltop whom Latino male secondary students identified as successful in supporting their educational potential. These factors supported the selection of Hilltop as a site of success worthy of study.

**Voice: Researcher Positionality**

In addition to context, voice plays a central role in portraiture. As Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) contend:

> In portraiture, the voice of the researcher is everywhere: in the assumptions, preoccupations, and framework she brings to the inquiry; in the questions she asks; in the data she gathers; in the choice of stories she tells; in the language, cadence, and rhythm of her narrative. (p. 85)

As a result of the researcher’s more evident and visible perch and perspective, it is imperative for portraitists, perhaps even more than other researchers, to make explicit their “personal contextual frameworks” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 67) in order to reflect upon the assumptions and expectations that they bring to their work. It is equally important for portraitists to also acknowledge the (im)possibilities of fully articulating these subjectivities (Pillow, 2003). Accordingly, they must both try to disclose their multiple frames of reference while also approaching their work with
“constant vigilance and calibration” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 95). This work is necessary to ensure that while the self is a research instrument in portraiture, the resulting piece of scholarship is not itself a self-portrait (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997).

To that end, I attempt to articulate below the individual characteristics and experiences that shape my voice and approach to the subject and setting of this study in the hopes that the reader, knowing from where I sit and speak, “can more comfortably enter the piece, scrutinize the data, and form independent interpretations” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 96).

1. **Urban Public School Advocate:** I am a strong advocate of urban public education, believing that while serious and endemic challenges exist in many schools, there are, as Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) contend, “more positive educational encounters to be found— and moreover, to be learned from” (p. 163). This belief in the possibility and promise that exists in urban schools inevitably shaped the way that I entered the classroom, engaged with teachers, and dialogued with students. For example, I approached each focus group with a belief that the student participants had something to add to the discussion around successful teaching for Latino male students in urban areas and entered each observation with a belief that “good” teaching would be enacted. In many ways, this positionality made the ‘search for goodness’ easier, yet, it also required me to be more vigilant, more skeptical, more questioning, in order to more accurately and authentically “paint” what I saw, heard, and felt in the field.
2. **Critical Constructivist:** Embracing the framework that guides this work, I believe in the reciprocal nature of education and the co-construction of knowledge. I believe in exposing and exploring the ways that power is enacted in educational processes and believe in soliciting the perspectives of those who are too often marginalized from discourse on teaching and learning. These beliefs were operationalized and tested in this study as I sought to co-construct knowledge of successful teaching for Latino male secondary students. At times, co-construction was not easy and relationships were not reciprocated. For example, in my reflective memo-writing after a focus group with one group of student participants, I note that facilitating discussion was, “like pulling teeth at times—Xavier, Lucas, and Gabriel were not open to sharing.” Such moments were carefully documented in my daily reflections and were considered in the creation of the final portraits and analysis in order to offer transparency on the process and to ensure authenticity of the products.

3. **Former Teacher at Hilltop High School:** I began my teaching career as a student teacher at Hilltop High School in 2005. I made my first mistakes, celebrated my first successes, and formed my first relationships with New York City students in its classroom and hallways. From 2006 to 2008 and then from 2009 to 2012, I served as faculty, teaching English and Dance and Choreography to students across grades 9 through 12. In the latter years at Hilltop, I took on the role of Professional Development Coordinator.

   My history with Hilltop High made me an “insider-outsider” (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009) in this work. According to Dwyer and Buckle, an “insider” shares
membership with the population under study while an “outsider” does not. An “insider-outsider,” embodies the “space between.” Having worked at Hilltop for six years prior to conducting this study, I was an insider in that I was a member of the Hilltop family. I had deep connections to the Hilltop faculty and staff and felt a sense of fondness and gratitude when I thought of my time there. Having moved on to graduate school, however, I was an outsider in that I was no longer a part of the current Hilltop community. I did not know any of the current students when I began the study in the Fall of 2016, had not met several new faculty members, and was not privy to the school’s inner workings in ways that I was when I was on staff.

My status as an “insider outsider” offered important benefits in this work. For example, my prior role as a Hilltop teacher made the process of recruiting participants easier. I contacted the administration and they were able to easily set up a meeting for me with eleventh and twelfth grade Latino male students from whom I could solicit faculty nominations. Additionally, though I had never met the ten Latino male participants who eventually joined the study prior to recruitment, at least one student participant explained that they agreed to participate in the pilot study because they had heard about me from alumni. Thus, while I was not a current faculty member, my status and reputation as a former Hilltop educator contributed to my credibility and facilitated access.

These benefits, while important, are balanced against the challenges presented by my longstanding relationship with Hilltop. For example, in conducting research that examined the practices of Hilltop faculty and the
experiences of Hilltop students, I brought along several beliefs: 1) I believed that teachers at Hilltop genuinely wanted to see their students succeed; 2) I believed that Hilltop students genuinely wanted to learn; and 3) I believed that Hilltop was a site of ‘goodness’ and success. These beliefs necessarily impacted the way that I viewed Hilltop students, faculty, and the interaction between the two. For instance, I found myself primed to search for goodness in the stories shared by student participants. I expected them to have positive experiences with the three educators whose practices were under study based upon my own prior experiences with these former colleagues. My daily self-reflection and post-observation memo-writing proved to be a fruitful place to manage these feelings as did actively listening for discrepant data. For example, after discussing a challenging moment in Harrison's class with Jorge, I wrote:

As for the classes I observed, having since talked to Jorge about the incident in class, I felt more attuned to the way that Harrison engaged with his male students—to moments that trouble this notion of 'successful teaching.' I think that this is the power of work with students as they offer insights that we would not necessarily hear/see. That is the importance of the project—for example, I may think that one of Harrison’s lessons is successful, but they may not necessarily. So, where does that leave us?

Such opportunities to reflect were central in managing my various subjectivities and how they manifested themselves in this research.

4. **Current Graduate Student:** The impetus of this work was not only my own past experiences with Latino male students at Hilltop High School, but also my ongoing learning as a current doctoral student. In particular, my work as a research assistant with Dr. Michelle Knight-Manuel from 2012 through 2015 offered me opportunities to explore issues related to culturally relevant,
responsive, and sustaining education and the educational experiences of Latino male students in New York City. For example, having observed professional development sessions around creating a culturally relevant, college-going culture for Black and Latino male students facilitated by Dr. Knight-Manuel in New York City high schools, I had heard about current practices enacted in city schools to improve the educational experiences of Latino male students. I brought the knowledge and experience gleaned from this work to bear in framing and conducting this study.

5. White, Monolingual, Upper Middle-Class Female: As a White, English-speaking, upper middle-class female, I brought a particular worldview to my work that, while unlike that of my Latino male participants, was perhaps familiar, in some ways, to the study’s focal teachers with whom they worked. For example, my own educational autobiography is replete with moments in which my culture and language were validated daily through the curricular and pedagogical choices made by the teachers in my district. To illustrate, the language of instruction in my schooling, English, was always aligned with that which I spoke at home and my school’s competitive ethos was not antithetical to the values of the community in which I was raised. To that end, as I pursued this study, I recognized that I could never fully apprehend or appreciate what it is like to be Latino, to be male, to speak a language other than English in my home, or to be raised in a different socioeconomic class than the one I was born into, just as I could not assume that I fully knew what it is like to be White, female, monolingual, and upper-middle class in all contexts for all people. I was cognizant that “dangers seen, unseen,
and unforeseen” (Milner, 2007, p. 388) could emerge if I was not mindful of the large role that my and my participants’ racialized positionalities and cultural ways of knowing played in conducting this research.

As I conducted this research, I found that it was imperative to interrogate the ways that my identity, drawing upon the work of Duncan-Andrade (2007), as an “ambassador” (p. 633) of institutions that have at times represented “colonialism and repression” (p. 633) for people of color throughout history, impacted the ways in which my student participants viewed and responded to me as well my interest in conducting this research. For example, it became critically important to interrogate the ways in which my own monolingualism potentially influenced student participants’ answers to questions regarding the necessity of a teacher’s appreciation for and leveraging of students’ multilingualism in the classroom. In order to attend to these various concerns and others that might have been unknown or unanticipated, I took Milner’s (2007) suggestion to engage in reflection with my participants, both teachers and students, about what was happening in our particular research community and to keep race and culture at the center of our discussions. For example, in an individual interview with Mr. Nelson, I attempted to bring our conversations back to the topic of students’ identities:

And even our discussion about language, we have not yet addressed the fact that the three of you and myself are all, with few minor exceptions, monolingual. To what degree it is important to the Latino young men in your classrooms to have a teacher that can speak Spanish? What do you see the role of language in the classroom and the role of the language that students bring with them?
I also deliberately attended to issues of race and culture and to any tensions that surfaced in my daily self-reflection and post-observation memo-ing. For example, in one such memo, I wrote:

Poole’s initial question: 'Who are we talking about here… Hispanic or Latino?' put me on edge. I constantly second guess my own understanding of the nuances in the terms and am particularly sensitive to being seen as someone who is ignorant on the subject. He was under the assumption that Latino was only to be used when describing folks on the West Coast...never heard that one before.

Finally, in crafting the final three portraits, I acted to ensure that the voices of all participants and their views on successful teaching were neither misrepresented nor overshadowed or silenced by my own narration through the inclusion of “thick description” (Geertz, 1994). For example, I drew heavily on students’ focus group transcripts and added images from their visual representations of successful teaching to the final portraits in order to allow them, as best I could, to speak for themselves about what constitutes promising practice.

6. **Mother to a Young Boy:** As a mother to a young boy, I am currently immersed in boyhood—in the challenges and delights of growing up male in today’s society. Accordingly, I have a personal interest in the success of young men in our nation’s schools. In my son, I see the face of many of my former students. They will share different, yet in some foundational, biological ways, similar journeys. This role and perspective shaped the ways in which I reacted and responded to my student participants. For example, student participants, after I disclosed that I had a son at home, frequently invoked my identity as a mother, particularly in the ways in which I “checked in” with students about their lives and provided snacks for each session. I believe that my role as a mother allowed me to form
relationships of understanding and reciprocity in ways that might not otherwise be possible.

7. *Teacher Educator:* Finally, as a teacher educator who was working with preservice teachers seeking certification in New York State at the time of the study, I believed that teacher education is best done in communion with students. I believed that students were experts on their own lives. For example, the most informative and enlightening conversations about race and education that I had the privilege to be a part of had not taken place in an institution of higher learning. Instead, they took place with students around a lunch table in Hilltop’s cafeteria. When asked, students have invaluable insight to share with teachers about teaching and learning. It is this belief that led me to this subject and to the design of this study.

While these outlined subjectivities above may appear to be static frames of reference, I see them, instead, as dynamic filters or lenses through which I see the work and the world. Accordingly, I see the process of self-reflection and self-criticism within the research process as ongoing. In the field and after, I tried to strike a delicate balance, utilizing myself as a research instrument while, “always keeping the *actors* in the focus and in the light” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 95). In doing so, I attempted to always be cognizant of the “ways [my] shadow might distort [my] clear vision of them” (p. 95).
Relationship: Research Participants and Data Collection Methods and Procedures

Relationship, in addition to context and voice, is foregrounded in the research process of the portraitist. Aligned with critical constructivism, the relationship between the portraitist and the actors is the vehicle through which data is collected and knowledge is constructed. It is in this partnership that access is sought and given, trust is built, and new learning is formed.

Research Participants

**Hilltop High School faculty participants.** In this study, faculty participants were selected utilizing a variant of Foster’s (1991) “community nomination” process. I defined community as all eleventh and twelfth grade students during the 2015-2016 academic year who self-identified as Latino males. These young men were asked to identify a Hilltop teacher (if any) that they felt is successful in teaching Latino male secondary students. As in Tyrone Howard’s (2001a) study of four successful teachers of African American students, nominators were not given criterion on which they are asked to identify who they considered to be successful teachers. Instead, they were just be asked to identify a teacher that they felt was successful in supporting Latino male students’ educational potential.

All eleventh and twelfth-grade Latino male students were selected because they had, at the time of the study, the greatest opportunity out of all Latino males at Hilltop to experience the teaching of the largest number of Hilltop teachers. Accordingly, these young men had the largest population of teachers from which to identify whom they believed to be successful in teaching Latino male students. By this community, eight
teachers were nominated. One of the nominated teachers was on leave for the 2016-2017 academic year and two other nominees had left Hilltop after the 2015-2016 academic year. The three teachers, out of the remaining five, with the most votes were invited to participate. One of these three declined to participate, while two, Mr. Poole and Mr. Harrison, accepted. Mr. Nelson, the nominee with the most nominations out of the remaining two, was invited to participate as the third focal teacher. He accepted the invitation and his practice along with the practices of Mr. Poole and Mr. Harrison were under study beginning in the Spring of 2016 (See Appendix A, Table 3).

**Hilltop High School student participants.** All eleventh and twelfth grade students at Hilltop who self-identified as Latino males in the 2016-2017 academic year and who were currently being taught or had previously been taught by Mr. Poole, Mr. Harrison, and Mr. Nelson were invited to participate in focus group interviews about their experiences of these teacher’s classroom practices (described below). A total of 10 students (See Appendix B, Table 4) both agreed to participate and completed informed consent and assent procedures.

In reflecting on the strengths and drawbacks of the samples outlined above, it is important to remember that studies that utilize portraiture are not intended to make empirical generalizations. Instead, studies that draw from this approach are interested in a close examination of some aspect or angle of a phenomenon experienced by individuals in a particular context. To that end, the sample of three faculty and 10 students, while small, allowed me to collect rich, substantial data on successful teaching practices for these young men.
Data Collection Methods and Procedures

Data collected consisted of four types: 1) ethnographic observations (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997); 2) semi-structured focus group interviews (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Flores & Alonzo, 1995; Morgan, 1997); 3) semi-structured individual interviews (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997; Maxwell, 1996); and 4) written documentation (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Data collection methods were chosen based upon research questions as demonstrated in Appendix A, Table 1.

Ethnographic observations of Hilltop High School faculty's classrooms. As is shown in Appendix A, Table 2, ethnographic observations were conducted to explore successful teaching practice in action over the course of a semester of four months, the same amount of time allotted by Tyrone Howard (2001a). Each of the three teachers were observed for 60 minutes a week for sixteen weeks in their focal class. In conducting the observations, I took on the role of nonparticipant observer and, using my computer, attempted to record the details of what was occurring in the field by focusing on concrete description (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). These recordings were later elaborated post-observation into full field notes (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw, 2011) and were joined by analytic reflections about the observed behavior (Marshall & Rossman, 2014) as well as notes about my role as the researcher.

In addition to writing up full field notes, I wrote an “impressionistic record” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 188) after each observation. Akin to an analytic or thematic memo (Marshall & Rossman, 2014), an impressionistic record is a reflective piece that identifies “emerging hypotheses, suggests interpretations, describes shifts in
perspective, points to puzzles and dilemmas (methodological, conceptual, ethical) that need attention, and develops a plan of action for the next visit” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 188). These impressionistic records played a foundational role in both data collection and analysis and served as an ongoing source of reflection on my various subjectivities. Together with the observational field notes, these data collection methods helped to answer both Research Questions 1 and 2.

**Focus group semi-structured interviews with Hilltop High School students.**

As shown in Appendix A, Table 2, student participants participated in focus group semi-structured interviews (Flores & Alonzo, 1995; Morgan, 1997) in order to “clarify classroom events and students’ behaviors by giving students the opportunity to address their own affective responses to their educational experiences” (Chapman, 2005, p. 39). Based upon student availability, student participants were divided into two groups. Each group met three times over the course of the study to discuss their experiences of the focal teachers' practices. Each focus group occurred on the school premises after school hours, lasted no longer than 60 minutes, and was audiotaped and then transcribed. The first interview was designed to gain a general overview of the students’ personal and educational backgrounds and to examine their framework of what constitutes successful teaching for Latino male students. The subsequent two interviews were conducted concurrently with teacher individual interviews and classroom observations and were utilized to gain clarification on observed instructional strategies. Interview protocols were developed utilizing Spradley’s (1979) framework in order to ensure multiple types of descriptive ethnographic questions. These protocols were also piloted and refined by more intensive review of the literature on culturally relevant, responsive and sustaining
pedagogies as well as student voice. In addition, I drew upon my observational field notes to reference specific teaching practices throughout the second and third interviews as well as engaged student participants in the creation of visual representations of their ideas including the construction of a “visual hierarchy of characteristics of successful teaching” and a collage of a “successful teacher.”

Aligned with this study’s critical constructivist framework, focus groups were selected in lieu of individual interviews for students because of their ability to disrupt traditional interviewer/interviewee power structures, to provide for more natural conversation, and support participants in making meaningful, authentic contributions (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1994; Chapman, 2005; Madriz, 2000). Insights derived from these focus group conversations were critical in answering Research Question 1.

**Individual semi-structured interviews with Hilltop High School faculty.**

Individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with Mr. Poole, Mr. Nelson, and Mr. Harrison in order to explore how these teachers made sense of their own practices (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Maxwell, 1996). Informed by Tyrone Howard’s (2001a) data collection methods, each teacher was interviewed three times over the course of the study. Each interview lasted no longer than 60 minutes at a location selected in consultation with the teacher and was audiotaped and then transcribed. The first interview was designed to gain a general overview of the teacher’s personal and educational background, and to examine his framework of what constitutes successful teaching for Latino male students. The subsequent two interviews were conducted concurrently with student focus groups and classroom observations and were utilized to gain clarification on observed instructional strategies. As with the student interviews, interview protocols were
developed utilizing Spradley’s (1979) framework and were informed by the literature review on culturally relevant, responsive, and sustaining pedagogies as well as student voice. Additionally, I drew upon my observational field notes to reference specific teaching practices throughout the second and third interviews. These conversations provided insight into teacher intention and served as a means of triangulating both ethnographic observations and student focus group data. Accordingly, they were helpful in rendering visible successful teaching practice for Latino male students and answering Research Question 2.

**Written documentation.** Finally, as has been articulated above, portraitists embrace context as a necessary component of their work. Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) go so far as to offer, “We have no idea how to decipher or decode an action, a gesture, a conversation, or an exclamation unless we see it embedded in context” (p. 41). Given the study’s interest in exploring successful teaching practice, classroom documents including lesson plans, student evaluations, student work, portfolios, and syllabi served as useful “informants of context” (p. 63). Accordingly, copies of informative resources such as those listed above were collected and analyzed for information that helped to paint a rich, thick, description of teaching in a particular social, cultural, and historical context (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997).

**Emergent Themes: Data Analysis**

Data analysis in this study was an ongoing, iterative process of description, interpretation, analysis, and synthesis of data from a variety of sources (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). This flexible and dynamic approach was an “active search for
connections and coherence” (p. 30) and a refinement of emergent themes, defined as central threads of the individual cases, or portraits (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Like case studies (Yin, 1994), portraits are written research documents designed to lead to new or deeper understanding about a given phenomenon and to instigate change (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2005). Aligned with the critical constructivist framework that undergirds this study, I drew mainly on constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006) to analyze the data and to construct a portrait of successful teaching practice for Latino male secondary students as it took place in each of the three teachers’ classrooms. In total, I constructed three portraits—one for each of the focal educators.

In this study, interviews were transcribed concurrently with document review and ethnographic observations. All materials were first organized in an electronic file by portrait so that I could locate specific data during intensive analysis. For each portrait, I read through all data sources using open initial coding (Charmaz, 2006) as a way to trace themes or patterns in the data (e.g. academic achievement) related to my research questions as well as preliminary findings from the pilot study. In particular, I listened and looked within and across data sources for in vivo codes (Charmaz, 2006), common refrains, metaphors, and rituals that are said (or seen) over and over by both the teacher and students in a variety of settings (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997) like the student participants’ repetition of the word “facts” as a descriptor for teaching that “makes sense” to Latino male youth. Second, I refined codes through focused coding, sifting through and synthesizing larger segments of data to determine which codes made the most analytic sense (Charmaz, 2006). These then served as “emergent themes” for each given portrait (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997) such as “creating connections to students'
lives, interests, and future goals.” Finally, I compared and contrasted the three portraits’ utilizing theoretical coding (Charmaz, 2006) to attempt to specify possible relationships between the emergent themes and how they may contribute to our understanding of successful teaching practices for Latino male secondary students.

**Aesthetic Whole: Authenticity**

To construct the three portraits, I attended to four core dimensions: 1) conception; 2) structure; 3) form; and 4) cohesion (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Conception refers to the development of each portrait’s overarching story. The portrait’s structure is defined by the emergent themes that result from data analysis. These themes serve as the framing for the body of the narrative, the form. Additionally, each portrait cohered because it was narrated by my one consistent voice. When these four components are joined together and mirror the experiences and images shared by the participants and experienced by the researcher, the aesthetic whole, according to Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997), has achieved “authenticity” (p. 260)—portraitists’ standard of internal validity.

To ensure such authenticity, this study utilized three strategies: 1) data triangulation (Maxwell, 1996); 2) the search for the deviant voice (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997; Maxwell, 1996); 3) and member checking (Maxwell, 1996). First, data from interviews, descriptive field notes, and documents from the field as well as impressionistic records were triangulated to look for points of convergence. Second, as I sought out moments of unification, of resonance, I was also open to disconfirming evidence, to that which deviates from the norm. Throughout the analytical process, I
listened for this dissonant voice and looked for discrepant data that did not fit the convergent patterns in order to ensure that I attended to alternate meanings and interpretations. Third, a draft of each portrait was given to the focal teacher and students for member checking. Aligned with the critical constructivist notion that all knowledge is co-constructed, this opportunity to share in the work was one way to help dismantle “the notion that the researcher is the only knower and expert on the lives and experiences of the participants” (Dixson, Chapman, & Hill, 2005, p. 17). After being reminded of the study’s goal of authenticity, participants were asked to review the draft thoroughly and to report any errors or misunderstandings. Two out of the three faculty members made minor edits for clarity. No student responded to the opportunity to review the portraits.

Limitations of the Study

In considering the potential impact of the proposed study, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of portraiture methodology. In particular, since its genesis, portraiture has been critiqued by for its lack of generalizability and replicability (English, 2000; Hackmann, 2002).

Generalizability

In contrast to the traditions and rituals of quantitative and experimental research where “the voice of the investigator is nowhere evident, where the first person is rarely (if ever) used, a where the structure of research design and text are predetermined and codified” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 86) in order to promote generalizability, portraitists do not seek to create broad empirical generalizations. Like case studies (Yin, 1994), portraits are neither intended to be complete representations of an individual or of
an individual’s experience nor to be generalized to larger populations. Instead, each portrait draws attention to the specific, to a slice of reality. Thus, they are inevitably and purposefully partial. In portraiture methodology, careful, close regard for the specific can offer insight into the general. It is in this way that the study’s findings can be useful and transferable to other educators of Latino male secondary students in urban contexts (Maxwell, 1996).

**Replicability**

Given the omnipresence of voice within portraiture, it is unsurprising that scholars operating from the positivist paradigm also question its replicability. “Because the researcher’s voice is intentionally woven throughout the portrait,” Hackmann (2002) offers, “replication of the study would be difficult” (p. 55). Critically, portraiture, recognizing the contextual nature of knowledge, does not strive for replicability. Each portrait is crafted to be “both a moment in time and of timelessness” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 4)—able to speak to who a person, organization, or phenomenon was, is, and who it may become. In this way, while not replicable, the portraits resonate across time and individuals (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997).

In conclusion, while the resulting portraits from this study may be neither generalizable nor replicable in the traditional sense, they are documents of both information and inspiration (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2005). Joining the “endeavors of documentation, interpretation, and intervention” (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2005, p. 8), the portraits highlight the experiences of teachers and their Latino male students in one New York City high school in order to help researchers, practitioners and policymakers understand the whole of teaching and learning differently (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis,
1997). In doing so, these artifacts of both art and science draw a broad and diverse audience into critical conversations about educational praxis.
Chapter IV

MR. POOLE

Mr. Poole’s classroom is one of four at Hilltop that are located on the sixth floor, two floors down from the main hub of the school. These rooms, along with a space now used as a college office, were assigned to Hilltop around 2011 when Tyler, the large, comprehensive high school that occupied the building, was being disbanded. The floor is now shared by five other small schools that emerged during Michael Bloomberg’s tenure as New York City mayor. Its hallways, cloaked in off-white, are void of any school insignia or student work. They are also eerily silent. Most mornings, the only sign of life in these halls is a school safety officer who can be found leaning against the wall next to the faculty elevator.

About halfway down the floor you will find Poole’s sanctuary—a nondescript, rectangular space appointed with thirty-five “one-armed bandits,” the language the campus custodians use for single-seat chairs with attached desks and wire baskets below. While the room’s décor is sterile, there is a palpable aura of warmth and comfort inside. Bodies are relaxed. Smiles are visible. Laughter is ubiquitous. This “laid-back” environment is reflective of the spirit and style of Mr. Poole, a fifty–year-old, second-generation, Irish-American from Toms River, New Jersey who has been teaching math and science in New York City public high schools for 20 years. As Diego, a 16-year old male student from the Dominican Republic, aptly explains, “Poole just takes things easy.”

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Just before the start of first period, Mr. Poole, dressed in a monochromatic outfit of charcoal gray shirt, gray spotted tie, and black slacks is perched on a stool at the front lab table reviewing student lab reports. The day’s AIM “What is half life?” and a set of “Do Now” problems asking students to write out nuclear decay equations are projected on the white pull-down screen at the front of the room. At this early hour, small groupings of students have formed around the classroom, more than a handful of which are wearing hoodies, a prohibited item of the Hilltop dress code of white collared shirt, black pants, and black sneakers. As they chat, they eat an assortment of rations from the school cafeteria and corner bodega—small white plastic bowls of cereal, wax paper-wrapped bacon, egg, and cheese on a roll, and the occasional carton of apple or orange juice. The familiar beat of bachata bleeding out a student’s headphones serves as the morning soundtrack.

As the bell rings, Poole moves from behind the lab table and calls the class to attention. “Alright, the bell rang. Books out.”

“Mister come on, five more minutes,” Ricardo, a 17-year-old Latino male student from the Dominican Republic with a tight fade, begs.

Poole’s retort is quick and to the point. “No.”

Ricardo is seemingly unfazed by Poole’s directness though I am initially. He smiles at Poole and begins settling into his seat. Within seconds, Diego enters with his belt draped around his neck and cereal in his hands. Moving between the rows, he stops to shake hands with Ricardo and gives Luciana, a Latina female with glasses, a kiss on the cheek.

“I’m early,” Diego announces to Poole.
“Early?” Poole retorts then offers sarcastically, “Can you tell time?”

Diego’s grin consumes his face. It is evident to me in this interaction that such banter between these two is a common occurrence. Poole smiles as Diego finds a seat, places his bowl on the corner of his desk, and takes out his materials for class.

As I look out from my seat at the back of the classroom, I watch as students begin, at varying speeds, to take out their notebooks and begin working through the problems at the front of the board. The room is loud, but productive. While the discussions among students around me do touch upon Chemistry, I can hear snippets of talk about upcoming senior events, recent sports news, and work for other courses as well. It is a far cry from Rockwellian portraits of children sitting in desks with hands clasped in preparation for learning and some may even label the scene “chaotic,” yet Poole seems to have his finger on the pulse of the classroom. Seeing that Ricardo is moving particularly slowly this morning, Poole checks in.

“Ricardo, where’s your book?”

Ricardo looks up. “Mister, I think that I left it at home.”

Poole barely flinches, his stride continuing in its original direction.

“Psych!” Ricardo calls out, waving his text in the air.

Poole chuckles, looks Ricardo in the eyes and then checks his IPhone for the time before slipping it back in his pocket. He lifts up a piece of chalk from the register in preparation for reviewing the “Do Now” assignments. Residual white dust flies.

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Poole’s classroom climate is atypical in my experience at Hilltop. Outside the gaze of administrators whose main offices are on the eighth floor, Poole’s room appears to be a space defined by freedom and forgiveness. Carlos, a Dominican-American senior, Ricardo, and Diego speak to Poole’s classroom ethos in an afterschool conversation:

Author: Poole’s class, when I was thinking about it, almost seems like another world down there on the 6th floor. There seem to be different rules.

Ricardo: Poole’s rules.

Author: And what are Poole’s rules?

Diego: Awesome rules.

Carlos: I feel like there are no rules.

Ricardo: Yeah.

Author: Is that a bad thing?

Carlos: Not really because we know, we are mature enough to do certain things. Like we know what to do and not to do, so the things that we do, they’re not really like, they’re not bad in any way, it’s just that side conversations to some teachers are terrible, and side conversations to him are just like, you see your friend. I feel like, I feel like he gets where we are coming from when we do things like that so he won’t get mad. He’s patient.

Patience, for Poole, is an appropriate response to other human beings whose lives are complex and responsibility-laden. Growing up, Poole heard the stories of his father, an immigrant from Ireland who struggled as a teen to find his footing in urban America. Reflecting on the impact of his father’s autobiography on his own teaching practice, particularly with Latino male students like Carlos, Ricardo, and Diego, Poole offers, “He
had that city, that tough-living experience in the city that many of these males have. I kind of recognize him in some of these guys.” This recognition is of critical importance to young men like Jorge who immigrated into the United States five years ago. Describing an interaction with a teacher who he felt failed to recognize the circumstances of his upbringing, Jorge explains:

I feel like, like let’s say, we all come here, well most of my friends I mean, we think our education is important, but I feel like sometimes, you do anything, he sees we havin’ fun some type of way, and he wants to make it a big deal somehow. Like the other day, me and a friend was laughing, laughing together, and he just said ‘Come here. I want to talk to you guys… are you planning on going to college?’ We’re like ‘Yeah.’ And he’s like ‘You guys need to work on character’ ‘cause we laughed at one point at time. Like you don’t know if, if the people in my neighborhood would come over to Hilltop, like I don’t know what would happen, how he would react if he sees the way they act ‘cause compared, coming where I come from, like compared to other people, I know how to behave, so it’s a big difference…I guess he just wants us to pay attention at all times and do what he wants us to do…Like he obviously really dislikes people misbehaving.

In contrast to the teacher described by Jorge above who sees failing to “pay attention at all times” as misbehavior, Poole sees classroom moments in which students “break character” as a natural part of learning. Poole offers:

I certainly disagree sometimes with some of the stricter disciplinarians, you know, you can’t do anything, stay focused constantly, but then you go in a classroom with adults, like teachers, you go into a teacher meeting and people are doing the same thing. Your mind wanders and if you are just staring at a stupid PowerPoint, you’re not paying attention, that’s just going right through you, but if you laugh and have a joke and maybe whatever, then maybe, okay, it’s starting to sink in. I don’t believe in that rigid, absolutism. You have to sit like an anomaton and no human aspect can come out. Embracing the “human aspect” of teaching and learning, according to Poole, does not mean lowering expectations. Instead, it requires creating a pedagogical practice that is rigorous and responsive to student needs. As Poole notes:

Upstairs, they just told us that 90% of our school is Title I, so everyone is poor and most of the kids going home are taking care of other kids, cooking dinner, there is
not a lot of time for them to do stuff. I give them my homework weekly so that I let
them be a little independent. They have to figure out how they are going to get this
done over the week. You know, one day, who knows, something will happen,
someone will get sick and then they will have no time to do stuff, but then they can
balance things out.

By recognizing the conditions of students’ lives, their roles and responsibilities as
members of their family and communities, and not lowering academic expectations, but
instead offering independence both within the classroom and within his curriculum, Poole
demonstrates what he refers to as “empathy”—sincere concern for others. For Poole, his
legacy will be defined by this humanness. He reflects:

And whatever, my feeling is if they forget me 5, 10 years, I don’t care, I’m just
trying to push them further along, try to make their lives a little better. That’s where I
am coming from—what can I do to make this kid have a better life?

Poole believes that one of the best ways that he can “push” his Latino male
students “further along” is by equipping them with the analytical and deductive reasoning
skills that are hallmarks of the math and science disciplines. Describing this goal, Poole
notes:

A major part of what I try to do is teach the students how to think. They come in,
ninth graders, whatever, and they are kind of scatterbrained in that they do not think
logically, deductively, and that’s important to my subject areas, so in my question
techniques and in how I teach or whatever, I force the kids to think in a deductive
way, in a certain direction. Not circular, but towards an end.

To assist students in this process of learning how to think, Poole uses a mild
variant of the Socratic method—gently prodding students with questions aimed at
helping them to not only reach the desired answer, but also to understand how they got
there.

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Twenty minutes into a lesson on physical properties, Poole, dressed in black slacks, a burgundy striped shirt and geometric burgundy and brown tie, stands at the front black board and addresses the crowd. “This is the information that we learned yesterday,” Poole begins, hovering over a student’s answer to question number one. “Explain the difference between a homogenous mixture and a heterogeneous mixture. Give an example of each.”

Poole continues. “We are talking about mixtures, homogenous versus heterogeneous. Homogenous—evenly distributed. Heterogeneous—uneven distribution. If you take a mixture and you look at it, and it looks the same everywhere, it’s homogenous. If you take a mixture, and say ‘Oh, that part’s different than that part which is different than that part,’ it’s heterogeneous.” Poole shifts his weight. “So, a homogenous mixture,” pointing to the first student’s answer, “is black coffee. Correct.” “Heterogeneous mixture? Soda.”

“So, Anabel, why would soda be heterogeneous?” Poole asks, cocking his head slightly to the side.

Anabel, a petite young woman with auburn hair, responds without looking up from her notes. “Because of the bubbles.”

Poole nods and gestures to an invisible soda bottle. “You see the bubbles here, but not here. You are seeing different parts, so it is heterogeneous.”

Matteo, a confident, Latino young man with black-rimmed glasses and a wide smile quickly chimes in. “How about juice, when you mix it and the sugar stays on the bottom?”

Poole doesn’t skip a beat. “You tell me.”
“It would be, I don’t know how to pronounce it, the hero one. Hero-geneous.” The last word labors out of his mouth.

“Het-er-o-gen-e-ous,” Poole responds, carefully articulating each syllable.

“Correct, ‘cause you can see—if you see a lump of sugar at the bottom, and you see other parts where there is no lump of sugar, there are different parts. Heterogeneous. Who can give me another homogenous mixture?”

“Milk,” offers a student in the back.

“Everyone loves milk. I gave you milk yesterday. Give me something different than what I gave you.”

Walter, a reserved Latino young man in the front row mutters, almost inaudibly, “Water.”

“What kind of water?” Poole smiles, seeming to anticipate the upcoming discussion.

Walter hesitates. “Normal water?” His voice gradually lifts at the end.

Poole steps back and lowers the chalk in his hand. “Now be careful. We don’t want to say just the word water because that is a very important compound in chemistry class. If we say water, we are talking about H₂O.”

“I said pure H₂O for my example ‘cause some water has Clorox, and other stuff,” Matteo eagerly offers in a cadence that quickens with every passing word.

“So, would that be pure? If you are saying pure, you are saying just H₂O.”

Matteo’s confidence wavers ever so slightly. He begins again. “Yeah I am saying pure. The one that has an even amount of distribution. No?”
Poole looks Matteo directly in the eye. “If you are saying just water, is it a mixture?”

Matteo pauses. “No.”

Poole continues, ushering him in the right direction. “And if it is not a mixture, can it be heterogeneous or homogenous?”

“Oh…no,” Matteo responds.

Satisfied that they reached the correct destination, but committed to driving this point home, Poole begins, “If you are going to say water from the sink, water from the faucet, that is a mixture. You can call it tap water. If you have a bottle of water, Aquafina, whatever, Poland Springs, that is also a mixture because there are other things in it. If you look at the label, it usually tells you about potassium or some other rare compounds. But in this class, if you say water—Matteo are you with me?” Poole pauses, waiting to see a visual sign of confirmation from the middle row.

Matteo nods.

“If I say water, that means H₂O only. That means the compound. If you want to talk about a mixture, you have to talk about tap water, bottled water, ocean water, river water, bath water…”

Poole pauses for effect.

“Spit.”

A chorus of “Ew” breaks out around the room.

Poole chuckles, delighting in students’ prudishness. “What is spit? What is saliva?”

Layered answers of “acids” and “bacteria” and other undesirable elements emerge from all corners of the classroom.
“But what about, what we are talking about here?” Poole vigorously points to the terms heterogeneous and homogeneous on the board.

Matteo, with confidence now, exclaims, “It’s a heterogeneous mixture.”

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For some Latino male students, particularly those who are accustomed to didactic instruction, Poole’s pedagogical method can be initially frustrating. In a conversation about Poole’s practice, Diego offers:

Diego: Didn’t you see this morning? When I asked him, he didn’t want to give me an answer.

Author: What does he respond with, Diego?

Diego: You gotta think.

Author: But how does he do it? If he doesn’t give you a straight answer, what does he do?

Diego: He gives you an example.

Author: What do you think of that technique, of questioning that way?

Diego: It’s (pause) frustrating.

Such frustration is not lost on Poole. Speaking about how he knows when students are struggling, Poole notes, “I am a pretty good reader of people, especially students. I can see it in their face and in their eyes.” When faced with such visual cues of confusion, Poole draws upon another sense—hearing. He explains:

… I try to listen more than I speak. You know I can kind of hear what they are thinking… Some teachers I’ve seen in the past, they don’t necessarily listen to what a student is saying and they kind of talk over them and tell them what they should do. As I am trying to teach them how to think, you got to hear [emphasis added] them
think. So, when a kid is saying, ‘Oh I’m confused.’ You say, ‘Well, why?’ and just do prodding questions and you make them talk more. And again, leading them, and you hear where they are starting to go off, well then you change the direction. You have to make them do the process, by guiding them and so on.

This ability to support students in overcoming the paralyzing feeling of frustration is perceived by young men like Ricardo as one of Poole’s most salient expressions of care. Ricardo offers:

He kinda knows where each student is academically, so if you need help, he tries the best to go with you, and the example that he gives you, he tries to make it easy for you to understand. He just shows that he cares.

For Ricardo, Poole’s demonstration of care is both in his ability to “know where he is academically”—to read him— as well as in his ability to “go with you”— to respond with sincere concern and academic support in the form of alternative explanations.

Poole’s selection of supplemental examples that “make it easy” for his Latino male students to better understand class material, particularly when they are initially confused, are a defining element of Poole’s pedagogic craft. In watching him work, I am often amazed by the varied and rich storehouse of examples from which he draws—from history, to current events, to popular culture. Describing how he thinks about explaining scientific concepts to struggling students, Poole offers:

Again, I’m not biology, but I have some knowledge of how you are making these connections in your brain and you are connecting different parts of your brain and so if you can make as many connections as possible, even if it is slightly disparate, but somehow you can make a connection, then it sticks. It is going to last longer. And I try to do that as much as possible.

Lasting learning, according to Poole, is the product of such relationships. “The more connections you can make, the better understanding is going to happen,” he argues.

Jorge agrees. Describing his collage of “a successful teacher” (Figure 1) during one of our afterschool meetings, he explains:
It’s says creating connections. I wrote that because teachers who find ways to make us relate to what they are talking about... I think that is important because it makes us understand things better and feel like we are learning with a purpose.

![Image of a collage](image)

*Figure 1. Jorge’s collage of a “successful teacher”*

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Perched behind a black lab table at the front of the classroom, Poole facilitates a discussion around the history behind scientific notation. Poole offers, “Most of the units of length come from body parts. In America, we measure in inches. That comes from a body part. What body part do you think is an inch?”

Stephanie, a quirky young woman whose face is framed by short locs, looks down at her hand before responding. “A finger.”

Marcel, a Latino young man with an athletic build, specifies further. “A thumb.”
Poole smiles. “Yes. An inch originally came from the width of a man’s thumb.”

Turning to Marcel, Poole demonstrates with his own hands. “If you take your thumb and you squeeze down on a ruler, it will be approximately one inch.”

Marcel imitates Poole’s demonstration, pushing his thumb down onto his desk.

Moving on to other metrics, Poole continues. “A foot, that’s easy, body part, foot.” He pauses slightly, almost as if rewinding time. “Back in olden days they use to use a hand, here’s a hand. We don’t use that now.”

Marcel chimes in. “I use a ruler.”

Acknowledging the thought process behind Marcel’s answer, Poole pushes gently. “But you use inches on a ruler. Where do inches come from? Your thumb. A ruler is a foot. Where does that come from? Right there.” He points behind the black lab table. “A foot.”

“Olden times they used to use the word ‘cubit.’ Anyone want to guess what a cubit is?”

Silence comes over the class.

Poole allows the silence to settle and then pushes forward. “Body part. We’ve got thumb, hands—”

A chorus of students from all corners of the classroom yell out. “Arm!”

Appreciating the energetic response, Poole coyly smiles. “What part of your arm?” Stephanie hesitates. “The whole arm?”

“From your elbow to your fingertip. That’s a cubit. That’s a cubit. A yard is another body part. Where does a yard come from?”

“A leg?”
“Both your feet?”

“Intestines?”

Poole appears momentarily startled, then softens. His eyes twinkle as he chuckles loudly. “Yes. They used to go to the market and say, ‘I want to buy some cloth’ and they would cut their stomach open and pull their intestines out.” Gripping his stomach, “Ow! That’s painful.”

The classroom erupts in laughter.

Like a good comedian, Poole revels in the roar of the crowd and then waits for the laughter to die down before continuing. “A yard is a man’s arm length from his fingertips to the center of his back. That is a yard. A mile. Can that be a body part?”

“That is too long,” retorts Marcel confidently.

“Where are my Spanish speakers? A mile. What does that sound like in Spanish?”

A collection of students from all corners of the classroom offer “Milla.”

“Milla. What is that in English?”

A student calls out from the back, “A mile.”

Again pushing gently, “Think beyond that. Not mile, mil. M-ee-l,” Poole urges, sounding it out.

“Million.”

“Not million, no, no...” Poole stops, regroups, then begins again. “Mil, in Spanish, what is mil?”

An audible sigh from the crowd and then, “Thousand.”

Poole is pleased. “Thousand. A thousand. A mile represents a thousand steps of the Roman army. So, you have the army and they’re all lined up and they march. Have
you ever seen an army? They march and step together. They do a thousand steps. That is one mile. That’s where it comes from. ‘Mil’ comes from Spanish, comes from Latin. Latin is the beginning of Spanish.”

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One means through which Poole helps his Latino male students to create “connections” that both aid in understanding and support students in feeling like they, as Jorge describes, are “learning with a purpose” is through leveraging their knowledge of the Spanish language. By drawing upon Latino students’ linguistic heritage in discussions of concepts like measurement and scientific notation that are at the heart of Poole’s curriculum, Poole supports students’ understanding of the course material as well as assists them in maintaining ties to their culture. Drawing upon his three years of experience teaching in the Peace Corps, Poole explains his philosophy around multilingualism:

Again, when I was teaching in Zimbabwe, it was like, it’s important that I teach you English, but you must also know your language because that is a part of your identity, part of your culture, part of who you are. English is very important because that has become the world language, so when we were talking, I’m always doing English with you and then they would see me with their fathers or their brothers or sisters or whatever and I would try to speak Shona to them, but for Latinos, Spanish is pretty common in this hemisphere, but in America you have to learn English, so it is important that they learn English.

While Poole acknowledges that English “has become the world language” and as a result, that the learning of English has immense cultural capital for his Latino male students, he also supports the maintenance of and connection to students’ home language of Spanish. Language, according to Poole, is a feature of identity—a way to understand “who you are.” It is also, according to students like Jorge, a means through which successful
teachers can demonstrate an understanding of “where your students come from.” This is an ability that Poole performs with fidelity and finesse.

**Discussion**

![Diagram of CRRSP tenets]

**Figure 2. Mr. Poole’s practice as a reflection of the tenets of CRRSP**

Based upon observations, individual interviews with Mr. Poole, and focus group interviews with Latino male students within his classroom, Poole’s pedagogical practice is reflective of three out of the four tenets of culturally relevant, responsive, and sustaining pedagogy as I have conceptualized it in Chapter II: 1) academic achievement, 2) authentic care; and 3) cultural and linguistic competence and dexterity. His observed practice was not reflective of sociopolitical awareness, the fourth tenet of CRRSP. As represented in **Figure 2**, the relationship between the three exhibited tenets, as they are enacted in Poole’s pedagogy and in his students’ experience with his pedagogy, is dynamic and overlapping. While acknowledging and appreciating this dynamism, in the
discussion below, I will address each CRRSP tenet individually and detail both if and how Poole enacted this tenet, as well as how he, along with his Latino male students, reflected on its pedagogical value.

**Academic Achievement**

Aligned with Howard’s (2001a) study of the pedagogical practices that four successful elementary teachers used with African American students in urban settings, Mr. Poole’s pedagogy marries a belief that all students can succeed with actions designed to foster this success. For example, Poole holds high expectations of his students’ academic content knowledge and skills—ensuring that they not only are able to identify, in a lesson on physical properties for example, a heterogeneous mixture, but also to be able to articulate the reasons why a mixture like soda is heterogeneous. He does not accept mere repetition of stock examples (e.g. “Everyone loves milk. I gave you milk yesterday. Give me something different than what I gave you.”) and instead encourages students to stretch their minds, to “think beyond,” and to create their own connections and explanations. Poole, however, does not demand the demonstration of such higher-order skills and content knowledge without requisite support. In each lesson, he meets students head-on—gently prodding (e.g. “You tell me.”), questioning (e.g. “What kind of water?”), and reinforcing (e.g. “Correct—‘cause you can see—if you see a lump of sugar at the bottom, and you see other parts where there is no lump of sugar, there are different parts. Heterogeneous.”) until they are able to succeed.

Speaking about the relationship between success and support, particularly for Latino male students, Poole reflects:
Most of the kids here, they respect, I think all kids originally do, they respect education, they appreciate education and they want to get educated, they want to learn things, they want to get smarter because they know it will be a good thing later in life, but then they hit stumbling blocks, they find things too hard, they get frustrated, and they break, they give up, they despair, so you have to prevent that from happening as much as possible. You don’t give a ninth grader a calculus problem. You give them something that is a little challenging, that they are going to feel good about solving, and you lead them along the way. You try to develop—I ask questions which I want them to think when I am not there, which are going to be logical, deductive questions leading them towards the answer.

In contrast to deficit views of Latino male students as “uninterested” or “oppositional” to education (López, 2012; Morris, 2005), Poole believes that his Latino male students “respect education” and “want to get smarter because they know it will be a good thing later in life.” Confirmed by Halx and Ortiz (2011) and Torres (2017)’s research with Latino male youth, Latino male students like Jorge, Ricardo, Carlos, and Diego do in fact hold a strong belief in the promise of education and need the support of school-based adults to overcome “stumbling blocks” inside and outside the classroom that impede their ability to succeed. In Poole’s practice, such support is demonstrated by his willingness to, as Ricardo articulates, understand where each of his students “is academically” and his ability to “go with” a student—to guide them in pursuit of greater understanding. For example, when Matteo offers “pure H2O” for his example of a homogenous mixture in the lesson on physical properties, “cause some water has Clorox, and other stuff,” Poole accompanies Matteo as he interrogates the logic behind his answer:

“So, would that be pure? If you are saying pure, you are saying just H2O,” Poole asks.

Matteo’s confidence wavers ever so slightly. He begins again. “Yeah I am saying pure. The one that has an even amount of distribution. No?”
Poole looks Matteo directly in the eye. “If you are saying just water, is it a mixture?”

Matteo pauses. “No.”

Poole continues, ushering him in the right direction. “And if it is not a mixture, can it be heterogeneous or homogenous?”

“Oh…no,” Matteo responds.

Poole’s ability to read and respond to both the verbal and non-verbal cues of students like Matteo as they are engaged in learning requires time and individual attention, which Poole agrees he offers “more than your average teacher.” Poole seems to know what his students like Carlos believe—that “when it comes to the teaching part, like getting to know your student individually, like what they lack, what they need to learn, like that makes a good teacher.” By understanding each students’ needs and scaffolding their progress towards course objectives, successful educators like Poole help their students to succeed.

**Authentic Care**

Seen in a relaxed classroom environment defined by student independence, Poole demonstrates an authentic caring relationship with his Latino male students that is based on mutual respect and personal trust or *confianza* (Antrop-González & Jesús, 2006; Cammarota & Romero, 2006; Fránquiz & Salazar, 2004; Irizarry, 2007; Vélez-Ibáñez, 1996). As expressed by Fránquiz & Salazar (2004), “…*confianza* develops when interactions in the classroom make [students] feel comfortable, valued, and trustworthy” (p. 49). For example, Poole’s decision to allow his students to select their own seats
rather than to enforce a standardized seating chart is reflective of this ethos of authentic care. Speaking about the rationale behind this practice, Poole offers:

They have their personalities, they are maturing and I let them sit wherever they want. And so, they sit with their friends because they are comfortable with their friends. Why be uncomfortable? When things get too much, yeah, I’ll say, ‘Move to the other side,’ but that hasn’t happened in a long time. It’s enough to say ‘Alright, you are off topic. Do your work,’ and then the kids get back to work.

Reminiscent of Joanne Marciano’s pedagogical reflection in College Ready (2013) about how she challenged her own assumptions that Black and Latino/a youth are distracting influences for one another in her classroom and, instead, embraced the pedagogical power of peers, Poole leverages the comfort that comes when youth sit and work with friends. Being “comfortable” within the classroom has a pedagogical purpose—peers can encourage one another, clarify tasks, and support successful engagement with the course curriculum (Knight & Marciano, 2013). A bi-product of such comfort, however, can be “off-topic” discussion like the talk of senior events, weekend plans, and sports news that I overheard daily in Poole’s classroom. In lieu of immediately labeling such moments as misbehavior and, as exhibited in Jorge’s description of an unsuccessful teacher, and communicating to students who engage in activities like laughing or side-conversations that they are not “college material,” Poole recognizes the human tendency to connect and authentically cares by working with students to create solutions that help them to choose academic excellence. Reflecting on this approach, Poole offers:

You want to be friendly with people and you want them to try and learn. Being a super disciplinarian, you know strict, where they are sitting in their chairs, I don’t think works, because their eyes are just going to glaze over. They are sitting there, but are they actually learning? ...And you think about any of these adult sessions that we sit at and people are always like, ‘Hey, how’s the family? How’s your kid?’ and you socialize with one another as you work. Why shouldn't that apply to our students as well? I understand we have a lot of material to try and teach, but isn't there a socialization that we can teach as well? You can say to the student ‘Okay fine, you
can ask about your friend's well-being, but it shouldn’t take 20 minutes.’ You do a five-minute ‘Hey, what’s up?’ in a certain context, in a certain experience, and then you do your work... When that gets carried away, then I step in and say ‘Look, you’re not doing your work, look what’s on your paper’ and I think they recognize that. It is a lot of herding cats at times, but that’s the nature of the job.

By demonstrating his understanding of the humanness that underlies his Latino male students’ behaviors in class as well as his colleagues’ behaviors in professional development sessions, Poole exhibits what Ladson-Billings (2006) refers to as “informed empathy” (p. 165). Such an ability to “feel with [emphasis added]” instead of “feeling[ing] for [emphasis added]” (p. 165) his Latino male students allows students like Carlos to feel understood. As Carlos notes, “I feel like, I feel like he [Poole] gets where we are coming from.” Reflective of the sentiments of Black and Latino male students in Watson, Sealey-Ruiz, and Jackson’s (2016)’s study of the culturally relevant caring practices of a mentor and his Black and Latino male students in an all-male, school-based mentoring program, Carlos and his peers value such understanding of their perspectives. Such a “humanizing experience” (Watson et al., 2016, p. 991) is often missing in traditional schooling for these young men where “control is sought and assumptions are made without getting to know them” (Watson et al., 2016, p. 991). For Latino male students under study, such experiences undergird successful teaching.

**Cultural and Linguistic Competence and Dexterity**

Heavily influenced by his time in the Peace Corps where he taught math, science, geography, and English in a village in Zimbabwe, Poole sees language as one of the central means through which students’ cultural identities are performed. It is through language, Poole argues, that multilingual youth “know where [they]’ve been” and are connected to their family and ancestors. Xavier, a 16-year-old Latino male junior, agrees,
offering that language “determines your background.” Bucholtz, Casillas, & Lee (2017), in their recent work “Language and Culture as Sustenance,” echo these sentiments, arguing that “the linguistic repertoires of youth of color must be sustained in educational contexts because language is a crucial form of sustenance in its own right, providing the basis for young people’s complex identities as well as their social agency” (p. 44).

In order to honor and sustain his Latino male students’ cultural and linguistic identities, many of whom, like Xavier, identify as Spanish-English bilinguals, Poole encourages his students to see that their home language of Spanish as a valuable conduit for their learning. By drawing, for example, the thread between Latin, Spanish, and scientific units of measurement like “mile” in his lesson on scientific notation, Poole demonstrates an awareness of and appreciation for the contribution and influence the Spanish language has had on the scientific discipline. In doing so, Poole treats his multilingual students as “learners who already know a great deal and who have experiences, concepts, and languages that can be built on and expanded to help them learn even more” (Villegas & Lucas, 2002, p. 23). In contrast to classroom spaces defined by hegemonic monolingualism (Bucholtz, Casillas, & Lee, 2017) in which languages other than Dominant American English are marginalized and speakers of such languages are labeled as linguistically deficient, Poole embraces Spanish as a cultural way of knowing and being that is paramount for both the sustenance of his students’ identities and their academic growth. Through explicitly guiding students in “creating connections” between their home language and curricular content, Poole develops his students’ cultural and linguistic competence as well as equips them with the academic skills necessary for success in postsecondary education and beyond.
Sociopolitical Awareness

Although Poole, in my observations and discussions of his practice, highly prioritized developing his students’ ability to “think,” his observed pedagogical approach did not explicitly support students in thinking critically about their social and political worlds. Accordingly, it did not reflect explicit attention to the development of his Latino male students’ sociopolitical awareness. In reflecting on the role that discussions of, for example, injustice may play in his chemistry course, Poole noted, “My class, unlike a history class, is not conducive to politics.” While Lasker and colleagues (2017), in their recent discussion of social and environmental justice in the chemistry classroom, acknowledge Poole’s sentiment that “real-world issues of social justice, health, and the environment are largely missing from chemistry curricula” (p. 983), they argue that “reframing chemistry as a means to solve relevant matters and injustices promotes student engagement, develops global citizens, and heralds true multidisciplinarity” (p. 983). Accordingly, these scholars encourage the adoption of project-based pedagogical approaches tied to justice-oriented topics including the impact of lead exposure on violence rates and IQ levels in inner city housing, lead poisonings in Flint, Michigan, and increased levels of industrial chemicals like bisphenol A in individuals consuming fast food. Through such efforts, chemistry teachers like Poole can help their Latino male students to draw explicit connections between their developing knowledge of chemistry and their ability to understand and to respond to issues of social and environmental justice in their communities.
Summary

In the forward to the revised edition of *The Dreamkeepers*, Gloria Ladson-Billings (2009) asks, “What happens when we get it right?” (p. vii). According to Mr. Poole’s Latino male students, successful teachers like Poole “get it right” when they are able to know where each student is academically and to persist in providing their Latino male students with academic support, when they facilitate student independence and create a classroom climate that is defined by tolerance and understanding, and when they demonstrate a respect for and understanding of students’ backgrounds and life experiences. Through these pedagogical practices, Poole, aligned with the tenets of culturally relevant, responsive, and sustaining pedagogies, provides his Latino male students with abundant opportunities “to be excellent academically, socially, and culturally” (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 12). In doing so, he reaffirms their humanity while preparing them to meet traditional societal demands like high school completion, postsecondary education, and workplace requirements. Importantly, Poole’s observed practice also encourages those invested in the education of Latino male youth to consider how educators of Latino young men can better equip these youth with the “critical thought processes related to those issues that are impacting their current and future lives” (Royal & Gibson, 2017, p. 19), including issues of social and environmental justice. In today’s social and political climate where linguicism, racism, and prejudice remain prevalent, particularly for young men of color, such opportunities for Latino male students to develop the skills, knowledge, and dispositions to act in response to inequity and oppression are especially critical.
Mr. Nelson’s classroom is located in the middle of Hilltop’s main floor. Colorful murals of world flags painted in partnership with New York Cares volunteers line the ceiling. Essays arguing about whether or not the American patriots were freedom fighters or “troublemakers” hang neatly arranged on the bulletin board just outside of his door. Inside, groupings of tables and chairs are clustered around the room. Though neat, the organization does not appear particularly purposeful. Nelson’s desk, which serves as more of a storage space than anything else, is pushed up against the window under the cream-colored shade at the upper left-hand corner of the room. Tattered maps that are slightly unfurled hang precariously over the front white board. An industrial-looking, gray classroom media cart on rollers takes center stage.

With the exception of a few laminated historical documents and a large poster of George Washington, Nelson’s classroom is a-disciplinary, which is particularly surprising when you get to know its primary occupant. To say Nelson, a 41-year old, self-identified White “American mutt” with Irish, Swedish and Polish ancestry from Elizabeth, NJ who has been teaching high school history in New York City public schools for 16 years, is an avid history buff is a gross understatement. Since I met him in 2006, I have always appreciated his passion for his content area. Peppered with dates, facts, and figures—a reference to Booker T. Washington here, a mention of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 there—any conversation with Nelson is a lesson in history. His face lights up at the mention of Reconstruction. He is almost giddy when talking about famed historian Eric
Foner. His enthusiasm for contemporary politics is palpable. Explaining the draw of his discipline and how its magic has sustained him for 16 years, Nelson reflects:

... I don’t think I can ever stop learning about history. It’s like, I always feel like I don’t know enough and you start questioning yourself like, ‘Oh, I don’t know anything about that topic.’ I do my Google searches and stuff, so that’s one thing. I think I always want to learn more about the topic. Um, and so, you know, I don’t get bored with it because I know that there’s always another historian’s point of view that could be taken into account, another way of looking at things, more visuals could be used to show some type of analysis about data or whatever. I just think that there are so many different ways to connect with it. It’s not just ‘Read a couple pages of a book, answer questions, it’s over and done.’ There’s just so many different ways to get into it.

Nelson’s clear pleasure in studying and teaching history is evident to Latino male students like Santiago, an 18-year old senior from the Dominican Republic. When asked what stands out most to him about Nelson’s practice, Santiago responds without hesitation, “I think that he really enjoys history… It’s something that you can see that he really likes to study.” An after-school conversation with three Latino male seniors from the Dominican Republic— Alex, Ricardo, and Fernando— echoes this sentiment:

Author: How would you describe Mr. Nelson?

Ricardo: He enjoys his subject.

Alex: Yeah, he does.

Fernando: A lot. A lot.

When pushed to consider the role that a teacher’s passion for their content has in their conception of a successful teacher, Ricardo clarifies:

If you have a teacher that doesn’t love what they teach, then the class would just be like strict, like you go to class and it would be like ‘You gotta do this, this, and this.’ If he love what he doing it would be more, he would expand on it.

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As the bell rings, Nelson’s daily PowerPoint is projected on the whiteboard at the front of the room. The day’s “AIM,” “How did Alexander Hamilton’s economic plan help America pay off its debts?” is centered in nondescript typeface on a barebones slide. Below, Nelson offers a “Do Now” question for students to consider as they settle in— “Is having debt a good or bad thing? Explain.” The classroom is abuzz with chatter accented by the occasional sound of a slammed locker door at the back of the classroom.

Nelson, clad in a checkered dress shirt with olive-green tie and khaki slacks, circulates the room. He stops every so often to check-in with students— his warm smile offset by the severity of his black-rimmed glasses. After several minutes, he quiets the class with a paternal “shh.” Student conversations subside within seconds and relative quiet comes across the room.

“How many people said debt is a bad thing?” Nelson asks. As I look around the room from my seat in the far back corner, 25 students have raised their hands.

“How many say it is a good thing?” Nelson continues. This time, five students lift their hands gingerly while Brian, a Latino male student at the front table, shoots his arm up. Noticing Brian’s eagerness, Nelson turns. “Why do you say that Brian?”

“It’s a good thing because it forces society to work to its fullest.”

“How?”

Brian hesitates before offering, “You know.”

“’You know!’ What an answer!” Nelson teases. “Can anyone help Brian out?”

Naomi, a girl at Brian’s table with a bun that seems to balance effortlessly on the top of her head, offers her assistance. She begins quietly at first. “Okay, so it’s good because if people are lending you things that means that they trust you enough to give it
back. But in terms of being bad, it’s that, if someone lends you money and they say this is a certain date to pay it back, and then you miss that date, that’s a problem. So, put it in terms of a credit card. So, you have a credit card, you purchase items with it. You have to pay the bank back the money, right? So, if you have to pay back the money, then you get credit so you can get a house or anything that you want.”

Students snap in support of her explanation, crescendoing at the phrase “so you can get a house or anything that you want.”

Nelson smiles and surveys the room for understanding.

“All right, if you weren’t fully sure of what she was saying, let’s try to explain this. So first off—” He stops abruptly. Side conversations from the back-corner table compete for air-time. Nelson waits with eyes focused in the direction of the noise until quiet is restored.

“First off, I think that most of us think that debt is a bad thing—we owe money to someone else. Like ‘Oh crap. Next time I get money, I have to give some of it to this person, this bank, whomever it may be.’ And that’s kind of annoying thinking in the future I owe all this money to somebody. So, if you misuse debt that could be really bad. But there are some positives to debt that Naomi touched on. So, let’s think, for example, we have two people. Let’s call them…” Nelson pauses for effect. “Charlie and Dominique.”

Charlie and Dominique, who sit at a lone two-top in the middle of the classroom, smile anxiously, unsure about where Nelson is going to go next.

“So, the two of them decide to go off to college. They think college is an important thing. They want to be educated so that they can go get a good job. So then,
they go to college, they get their degrees and one thing that is going to happen in college is that they are both going to get offered credit cards. They are not going to be like $50,000 dollars’ worth of credit, but they will probably be $250 dollars’ worth of credit or something like that. So, Charlie says, ‘Absolutely not. I am not touching credit cards. I don’t want anything to do with them. I hate debt. I see I can get into some trouble here.’ Dominique says, ‘You know, I want to go out. I want to buy some shoes. I want to go to the movies. I want to do a few things and I will put it on the credit card and then I will pay it back over time.’ She may pay more over time for it, especially if she is not paying the full balance off every month, but she will pay it back. So, a couple of years later, say 3, 4, 5 years later, let’s guess how much credit Charlie has.”

Students from all four corners of the room shout out, “Zero!!” “$500” “$250” Nelson hones in on the first and most frequent response. “Why zero?”

A female student at the side table offers, “Because he never took a credit card out.” “He never took the credit card out,” Nelson parrots before continuing. “So, let’s look a few more years down the road. They are looking to buy a house.”

The classroom erupts in whistles and catcalls as both Dominique and Charlie begin to blush.

Raising his hands to quiet the crowd, Nelson reassures his two participants. “Not with each other.” Their classmates grumble in disappointment as Charlie and Dominique smile.

He continues, “They both want to purchase a home. So, Charlie walks into the bank and says ‘I want to get a $250,000 loan for a house’ and the bank says, ‘Have you ever borrowed money in the past?’ and he says, ‘No. I am very responsible. I never
borrow money that I don’t have in the bank’ and they say—.” Nelson pauses again for maximum impact. “‘Declined.’”

Charlie feigns rejection, pounding his chest.

“Dominique goes into the bank and says, ‘I want to get a $250,000 loan for a house,’ and they say, ‘Have you ever borrowed money from anyone before?’ and she says ‘Absolutely’ and they say, ‘Great. Let’s pull up your credit score. Let’s pull up your credit history.’ And they say, ‘Oh. You borrowed $250 and then paid it back.’ Little by little they bumped it up and it got to $1000 credit limit as long as she was paying it back, and it kept increasing over time. Eventually it gets up to $5,000, $10,000. It starts growing. It doesn’t mean that she owes that amount, but they are willing to lend her up to that amount. And so, the more that she has borrowed and paid back, the more that she has a track record that shows that she pays back her stuff.”

“Now you also have Veronica,” pointing to a student in the middle left of the room who seems to be dozing, “who gets a credit card, maxes it out, and never pays it off. Well she’s not getting the house either.” Laughter can be heard across the classroom.

“Misusing credit can definitely be a big problem. But having no credit can also be a problem. The best thing is to use it and use it responsibly.”

Veronica, engaged now, asks, “Do you have credit?”

Nelson hedges, “Yes I have credit. Not the best in the world. Not the worst in the world. Probably better than 80 or 90 percent of people, but not as good as I want it to be.”

Demonstrating a line of relevant thinking, Naomi asks, “College loans are the hardest to pay off, right?”
“It might be a significant amount of money when you first get out of college, but they are a heck of a lot better than credit cards because the interest rates are much, much lower.”

Taken aback, Naomi offers in a shrill voice, “There’s interest?! Why is there interest?!”

Elvis, a Latino male student in the back of the room posits, “Because society is greedy.”

“No, America is greedy,” Naomi clarifies.

Nelson chuckles as he hands out his next assignment. “And I am greedy enough to give you more work to do.”

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Nelson’s ability to “expand” on his subject matter is reflected in his ongoing efforts to, in Nelson’s words, “come up with new ways of making material relevant to students and presenting it.” Describing his planning process, particularly how he selects the examples that he uses to explain historical concepts like Alexander Hamilton’s economic plan above, Nelson notes that his central concern is “What is the best way I can think about this in my mind and then describe it to kids?” Such attention to ensuring that the content is clearly explained and understood by students is a salient aspect of Nelson’s practice according to students like Santiago. Speaking about Nelson’s success with Latino male students, Santiago offers:

He’s one of the teachers that really goes outside the book or the curriculum. Sometimes he just walks in and has to do a lesson like every other teacher but I know that he breaks it apart and eliminates stuff and really teaches us the things that we need in the moment.
Gabriel, a 16-year-old Mexican-American junior, agrees, offering, “He gives more explanation to those who don’t understand what he’s talking about. He gives a useful example that they can use.”

Identifying “useful examples” is how Nelson seems to conceptualize notions of “relevancy” within his practice. While he articulates that for many Latino male students, “sometimes a lot of the history in the US History classroom is like ‘How is this relevant to me and to the culture that I come from?’” he also acknowledges that “You don’t hear that much, for example, about the Dominican Republic in this class except for one project that I do around imperialism.” While Nelson may not reference, for example the governmental structure of the Taíno, an indigenous group of people in the Dominican Republic, in his lesson on electing a U.S. president, he does focus on the development of skills that are relevant to students’ lives both in and outside of school. Explaining his overarching goals for his practice, Nelson offers:

I guess, helping students to develop the skills that are going to help them learn on their own, without ‘Oh I need to be in a classroom and have the teacher provide all of the information, I’m going to study it, memorize it, and then I’ll be ready.’ You know whether it is a skill to critically analyze, whether it’s a skill to have them learn to take notes from a college textbook, something that is going to give them a skill that will be relevant beyond that specific class, beyond that specific test or final exam for that class, something that is going to take them into the future like ‘Oh this is a life skill that I can use,’ and it might not even be academic, it might be a personal finance thing, like how to manage debt or avoid debt.

In practice, this attention to “skills” that transcend the classroom is tempered by Nelson’s need to prepare students for the New York State exam— the U.S. History Regents.

Describing the role of the Regents, Nelson offers:

I would say that on the one hand it could be a limitation because there could be some very important things that I think would kind of be neat to learn about that we don’t have time to talk about because we’re focused on the test. On the other hand, I
think that the test provides a guideline, like ‘Here’s my skeleton, here’s the basic things I need to make sure that these specific topics and issues get hit,’ so it keeps me on track a little bit. I know that it might be easy for some history teachers to get off on crazy tangents and go out to left field. Interesting, yes, but might not be helpful for passing the test.

Nelson’s ability to balance the holistic needs of his students with the need to equip them with the skills and content knowledge necessary for the Regents is appreciated by his Latino male students who identify a teacher’s skill at preparing students for state exams as a sign of successful teaching. As Santiago explains:

Pretty much everyone tells you when you go to high school you’ll have to take Regents and you’ll have to focus on that primarily so, I did, when I started as a freshman, I did look for those teachers that were famous for their classes and how their students did well on the Regents and my brother told me about that too like ‘He made me pass’ or ‘He did good’ and these are the things that I hear from my brother and other students hear the same thing.

An afterschool conversation with Carlos, a Dominican-American senior, and Ricardo and Alex, two seniors from the Dominican Republic, further illuminates the importance Latino male students place on a teacher’s ability to prepare them for standardized tests. When asked to create a “visual hierarchy” of qualities that they look for in a teacher (Figure 3), each of these three students prioritized “Prepares me for the Regents.” A follow-up discussion revealed their rationale:

Author: Let’s take a look. What is most important?

Carlos: ‘Prepares me for the Regents.’

Ricardo and Alex: Yeah. Me too.

Author: Why?

Carlos: ‘Cause I feel like that is the point.

Ricardo and Alex: Yeah.

Author: Regents is the point? Why?
Carlos: ‘Cause it gets you to the next class. To the next year. Since I’m a senior, some schools may look at Regents and stuff.

Figure 3. Carlos’s hierarchy of characteristics of a successful teacher

For these young men, a teacher’s ability to prepare them for the Regents is a way to prepare them for the future. Acknowledging the gatekeeping function of state exams, students like Carlos appreciate the ways in which teachers like Nelson ensure that they are going to succeed. These same students, however, underscore the need for a teacher to do so in an engaging manner. Describing his collage of “a successful teacher” (Figure 4) during a subsequent after school meeting, Ricardo explains: “I have entertainment, makes the class fun, not always serious and boring and knows how to have fun.”
Commenting on Ricardo’s collage, Alex offers, “A teacher that makes a class very fun, it will make students learn even more.” When pressed to consider how successful teachers go about making class entertaining, Fernando, an 18-year old senior from the Dominican Republic summed it up this way: “Make sure kids are active in your class. Don’t be boring.”

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Around twenty minutes into a lesson on how a president is elected in the United States, Nelson, dressed in a dark blue gingham shirt, blue polka-dotted tie, and khakis, circulates the room animatedly. With the 2016 presidential election in full swing and the latest debate between Trump and Clinton in national headlines, Nelson is clearly jazzed at the opportunity to discuss something so topical. Stopping in the middle of the room, he directs students to look at the back of a prepared handout.
“Let’s go to the backside. So, we’ve got our electoral college map. What I’d like you to do, let’s pretend that you wanted to win the presidency and you wanted to go to as few states as you possibly could. You only wanted to win the states you really needed to win to be the next president, which state would you want to go to first?”

Students around the room examine the map—a grainy, gray-scale representation of the 50 states with hand-drawn labels featuring the name of states and the number of electoral votes each carries.

“California!” a voice calls out from the back.


“It has the most electoral votes,” a female student offers at the left side table.

“Ah yes. It has the most electoral votes,” Nelson appreciates before moving on.

“So, what I want you to do is to come up with a formula, a certain collection of states that can get you to 270 electoral votes. Once you hit 270, you are the president. So, what you are going to do, we already have CA listed, what is the next state you are going to go for? You are going to have to keep a running total, once you hit 270 electoral votes or more, stop. Want to see who can do this in the fewest number of states.”

Wilson, a competitive Latino male student from the Dominican Republic who runs for the school track team calls out assuredly, “I got this, Mister. I got this.”

Charlie at the two-top in the middle of the classroom responds emphatically, “Nah, I got this.”

Nelson smiles, enjoying the atmosphere of friendly competition.

The sound of calculator covers being removed and the rustling of scratch paper is an unfamiliar one for a history class, but it is clear that students are taking this activity
seriously. As students work to identify a path to 270, Nelson circulates, stopping to comment on their selections and omissions. At one table, he questions, “Why are you going to put that in?” At another, he offers a suggestion, “Go for the big numbers. That will get you there the quickest.” To the full class, Nelson notes, “Keep looking around. Just because a state is small on the map, doesn’t mean it is not worth a lot.”

After several more minutes of calculations, and as conversations within earshot become noticeably more tangential, Nelson summons the class’s attention.

“How many people were able to do it in 15 states or less?”

All hands go up.

“Could anyone do it in 14 or less?”

All hands stay up.

“Thirteen or less?”

A few hands are lowered.

“Twelve or less?”

A few more.

“Could anyone do it in eleven?”

Wilson proudly shouts out, “Yes!”

“Ten?”

I look over at Charlie who seems to be checking his math. He stays quiet.

“So, you think you can do it in eleven?” Nelson confirms, looking Wilson in the eyes.

“Can I get someone with a calculator to do a running total for us?”

Julissa, a girl at the front side table, offers her tabulation services. She sits, fingers
hovering over the buttons, waiting for the first number.

“So far we have California and Texas, but we are not anywhere close to 270 yet.

So, where do you want to go next?”

“New York. 29.”

“29” Nelson directs Julissa.

“Where are you going next?”

‘Florida. 29.”

“Everyone agreeing with this order so far?”

Students nod in approval.

“Pennsylvania. 20.”

“Illinois. 20.”

“What are we up to thus far Julissa?”

“191. “

“We still have to go further.”

“Ohio. 18.”

“Georgia. 16.”

“Michigan. 16.”

“Are we there yet?” Nelson asks, turning towards the classroom accountant.

“241.”

“29 more to go.”

“North Carolina. 15.”

“New Jersey—”
“New Jersey—” Nelson stops, then needles, “The best state in the Union,” praising his home state and appealing to the historic New York/New Jersey rivalry.

“Booooooooooooooo,” Charlie chants, cupping his hands over his mouth to amplify his distaste for the Garden State.

The classroom erupts in laughter.

Composing himself, Nelson continues. “What are we at?”

“270 exactly,” Julissa offers.

“Let’s count them up—1, 2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10,11”

“I told you!” Wilson proudly shouts, his need for a win momentarily satiated.

“Wow, now think about this for a second. How many states are there?”

A chorus of students calls out, “50 states.”

“So, you are telling me if I win 11 states, but I lose 39, I can still be president?” Nelson asks.

“That’s not fair!” Julissa contends.


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Nelson’s injection of competition and humor captures Latino male students’ interest and facilitates connection and engagement with the historical content that undergirds his U.S. History curriculum. Even when his Latino male students think Nelson’s jokes are “corny,” they appreciate his willingness to act, at times, “just like another kid.” Describing Nelson’s appeal, Fernando explains, “He’s fun, man.” Lucas, a junior from the Dominican Republic agrees. “He acts like one of us. He uses humor.”

Sharing the impact of such an approach, Santiago offers:
I really think that joking or knowing your class goes together because when you walk in a class, you want to be excited to learn and that teacher in front of you motivates you to learn. When he [Nelson] walks in and starts with just cracking jokes, or sees you and your friends laughing, or he looks at you ‘Yeah. Pretty funny, right? Yeah.’ I don’t know, you see a teacher do that and you are like he’s nice because he lets us joke sometimes and you just connect with him.

Such connections, however, need to be based upon authenticity. Offering his advice to new teachers of Latino male students, Nelson notes:

Be yourself. Don’t try to be something you are not…You don’t have to say the exact same things. It is okay to be yourself and just talk and teach and do what you are doing from your point of view. You have a world that you grew up in and they have a world which may be different, but talk, interact, teach, learn. Don’t try to fit yourself into their world, because most students, almost anyone, is not going to like someone trying to force their way into their culture.

“Facts,” Jorge explains upon hearing this advice—a shared expression of agreement among Nelson’s Latino male students. Respect, care, and authenticity, for Latino male students under study, go hand in hand.

Discussion

Based upon observations, individual interviews with Mr. Nelson, and focus group interviews with Latino male students within his classroom, Nelson’s pedagogical practice is reflective of three out of the four tenets of culturally relevant, responsive, and sustaining pedagogy (CRRSP) as I have conceptualized it in Chapter II: 1) academic achievement, 2) cultural and linguistic competence and dexterity, and 3) authentic care. His observed practice was not explicitly reflective of sociopolitical awareness, the fourth tenet of CRRSP. As represented in Figure 5, the relationship between the exhibited tenets, as they are enacted in Nelson’s pedagogy and in students’ experience with his pedagogy, is dynamic and overlapping. While acknowledging and appreciating this dynamism, in
the discussion below, I will address each CRRSP tenet individually and detail both if and how Nelson enacted this tenet, as well as how he, along with his Latino male students, reflected on its pedagogical value.

**Figure 5.** Mr. Nelson’s practice as a reflection of the tenets of CRRSP

**Academic Achievement**

Nelson’s pedagogical practice is achievement-oriented. Given that his course culminates in a high-stakes test that is a high school graduation requirement in New York State, Nelson believes that his primary responsibility is to prepare all of his students, including his Latino male students, for this exam. Echoing the feelings of Latina/o students in Garza and Huerta’s (2014) study of care-full teaching who prioritize a teacher’s willingness to “prepare me for tests” (p. 143), Nelson’s Latino male students
argue that a teacher’s ability to prepare students for the Regents is “the point”—the most-desired outcome of successful teaching. This is further exhibited in student participants’ “visual hierarchies” of qualities that they look for in a teacher (Figure 3) in which young men like Carlos, Ricardo, and Alex placed “Prepares me for the Regents” at the top of their list. While both Nelson and his Latino male students acknowledge the limitations of a pedagogy that can be, at times, dominated by the rhetoric of and preparation for the test, both parties recognize that the exam serves a critical gatekeeping function (Delpit, 1992) for students. As Ladson-Billings (1995a) aptly wrote over 15 years ago, “Whether or not scholars can agree on the significance of standardized tests, their meaning in the real world serves to rank and characterize both schools and individuals…No theory of pedagogy can escape this reality” (p. 475). Nelson’s pedagogy is firmly rooted in this reality and through his practice, Nelson’s Latino male students feel that they are being prepared for life—one step closer to graduating high school and moving onto college or career.

Importantly, in order to prepare his Latino male students for academic success, Nelson’s practice is relentless in its support. Nelson has a “no student left behind” attitude and works tirelessly to ensure all students’ understanding. As captured in his statement, “Alright, if you weren’t fully sure of what she was saying, let’s try to explain this” during his lesson on Alexander Hamilton’s economic plan, Nelson recognizes that grasping new content can take time and often requires clarification and multiple and diverse explanations. This recognition and his resulting efforts to persist and expand upon initial attempts at conveying material is especially important for students who are recent
immigrants or who spent their primary grades outside of the United States. As Nelson notes:

…if they are new arrivals here or if their earlier grades were spent back learning in the Dominican Republic or stuff, they might not have the same teaching of American history or might not have grown up hearing the name George Washington or things like that. Just overcoming that lack of familiarity with certain terms, events, people.

Understanding that some of his students must overcome “a lack of familiarity with certain terms, events, people,” Nelson, as Gabriel describes, “gives more explanation to those who don’t understand what he’s talking about. He gives a useful example that they can use.” By being persistent in his instructional efforts (Garza, 2009; Gay, 2000) and attempting to utilize examples that “make sense” to his Latino male students, Nelson can support these young men in overcoming their lack of exposure to American history and facilitate their development of the skills and content knowledge necessary for academic success.

**Cultural and Linguistic Competence and Dexterity**

As alluded to in the discussion of academic achievement above, Nelson supports his Latino male students in overcoming a potential lack of exposure to American history by drawing upon examples that connect to students’ lived experiences. To illustrate, in his lesson on Alexander Hamilton’s economic plan, Nelson draws upon an example of credit card use in college. By describing a scenario in which two students in the classroom, Charlie and Dominique, make decisions around whether or not to apply for and use a credit card while attending college, Nelson both engages in college talk (Knight & Marciano, 2013) that reinforces his students’ college-going identities and explores notions of lending, borrowing, and debt that are relevant both to the discussion of
Hamilton specifically and to the U.S. History curriculum more broadly, as well as to students’ current and future lives. Nelson’s Latino male students appreciate this willingness to draw upon examples that are accessible and relevant to students, seeing it as a “commitment” (Garza, 2009, p. 311) to their learning. For example, speaking about the appeal of Nelson’s debt example, Santiago explains:

…like his example, he probably made it up right there, because juniors and seniors who are going to apply to college are thinking about what happens in college…so things like that just pop out to them and makes it really good.

By thoughtfully constructing and utilizing examples that “pop out to” his students, Nelson demonstrates a willingness to go, as Santiago explains, “outside the book or the curriculum” in hopes of facilitating his students’ understanding of and engagement with course content. Thus, while his practice may not be relevant to students’ “culture” when defined traditionally as a collection of established practices that are shared by a group of people in a specific location at a given time, it is relevant to his students’ current lived experiences and future goals. Alim and Paris (2017) argue that in order for pedagogy to be culturally and linguistically sustaining, it must move away from the sole attention to “the important ways that racial/ethnic difference was enacted by previous generation” (p. 9) and to the exclusive leveraging of longstanding cultural practices of communities. Instead, it must embrace a more fluid and flexible notion of culture. In this spirit, Nelson’s attention to personal finance and to how his students think about debt and spending, for example, illustrate how urban educators can attend to this important facet of their students’ cultural worlds.
**Authentic Care**

Nelson’s authentic care for his Latino male students is demonstrated through his passion, humor and attention. In lieu of “emotionally flat” and “intellectually dull” classrooms that may characterize the experience for a segment of young men of color across the United States (Goodlad, 1984, p. 112), Nelson’s classroom is a spirited space led by an educator who his passionate about his discipline. As Nelson acknowledges, “I don’t think I can ever stop learning about history… I think I always want to learn more about the topic… There’s just so many different ways to get into it.” Like the six culturally relevant, responsive, and sustaining focal teachers in Ladson-Billings’s (1994) study documented in *The Dreamkeepers* who “exhibited a passion about what they were teaching— showing enthusiasm and vitality about what was being taught and learned (Ladson-Billing, 1995, p. 163), Nelson’s delight and pleasure in studying and teaching history is apparent to his students, as captured in the after-school conversation with Alex, Ricardo, and Fernando:

Author: How would you describe Mr. Nelson?

Ricardo: He enjoys his subject.

Alex: Yeah, he does.

Fernando: A lot. A lot.

For these three students, one of the most salient aspects of Nelson’s practice is his visible enjoyment of the discipline he has chosen to teach.

Nelson’s passionate presence reflects Gay’s (2000) notions of agentive, action-oriented care as his love for his content translates into joy-filled pedagogical choices like his utilization of humor that support his Latino male students’ engagement. Aligned with
Garza’s (2009) finding that Latina/o students view having a good sense of humor as a quality of care-full teaching, Nelson’s Latino male students value his ability to make learning fun. Within the lessons that I observed, Nelson injected lightheartedness by leveraging references to popular culture, sports, current events or sayings within the school, as well as poking fun at himself. As exhibited in his lesson on the electoral college in which Nelson knowingly invokes the longstanding New York/New Jersey rivalry by claiming that New Jersey, his home state, is “the best state in the Union,” Nelson demonstrates an understanding that levity is not antithetical to learning. In fact, it is through such opportunities to “joke” with Nelson that Latino male students like Santiago feel that they “connect to him.” As Santiago shares:

I really think that joking or knowing your class goes together because when you walk in a class, you want to be excited to learn and that teacher in front of you motivates you to learn. When he [Nelson] walks in and starts with just cracking jokes, or sees you and your friends laughing, or he looks at you ‘Yeah. Pretty funny, right? Yeah.’ I don’t know, you see a teacher do that and you are like he’s nice because he lets us joke sometimes and you just connect with him.

According to Santiago, Nelson’s use of humor has pedagogical power by “motivating” the students in his classroom to engage with course content and skills like document analysis, taking notes from a college textbook, or mastering writing conventions that may not be inherently exciting or pleasurable. As Alex notes, “A teacher that makes a class very fun, it will make students learn even more.” By invoking playfulness and promoting laughter, Nelson demonstrates authentic care that draws students into their learning in meaningful ways.


Sociopolitical Awareness

While an argument could be made that Mr. Nelson’s use, for example, of credit card debt in his lesson on Alexander Hamilton’s economic plan supported his students’ sociopolitical awareness by fostering students’ understanding of powerful financial mechanisms like banking and financial aid that can either build or destroy wealth for individuals, families, and communities, I argue that it, as well as Nelson’s other observed practices and reflections, lacked the explicit politicality that Ladson-Billings (1994) emphasized in her theory of culturally relevant pedagogy. For example, while Nelson, in an individual interview, contended that “history is happening and being made right now in the present day,” when asked whether or not he would address current contentious and racially-motivated policy considerations in the Trump era like the immigration ban in his classroom, Nelson explained:

I generally don’t, I think Ms. Shaner [a colleague in the history department] probably does because she is more concerned with the current event stuff. I have content that I need to get them ready for the Regents, but when something comes up—in a couple of weeks we will get up to immigration, a mini unit on immigration and we will talk about Chinese imperialism and I am sure that will come up and we will talk about different policies.

Faced with the pressure of the high-stakes exam that culminates his course, Nelson feels that he does not have sufficient time to address “current event stuff” in his curriculum on a more extended basis. Instead, such discussions are relegated to moments within “mini-units” on potentially relevant and meaningful social, cultural, and political topics for his Latino male students like the unit on immigration. In considering alternatives to this approach, Epstein and colleagues (2011) describe how culturally relevant, responsive, and sustaining social studies teaching can engage students in critical analyses of societal forces like race that, while pervasive in students’ daily lives, are too
often unaddressed in the school curriculum. This study described how Ms. Varga, an eleventh grade humanities teacher in a small public high school in New York City, engaged her African American and Latina/o students in extended discussions about racism and power in order “to recognize the role of individual and group agency in challenging inequality in historical and contemporary societies” (p. 2). For example, in a three-week unit on the Civil Rights movement, Ms. Vega dedicated a week to the Young Lords Party—a political movement of Puerto Ricans who protested government racism in the 1960s. By engaging in such explorations, students in Ms. Vega’s class, according to pre- and post-curricular measures, “recognized that people of color had made major contributions to history and society through individual and collective struggle and achievement” (p. 12). While acknowledging that the pressure to “teach to the test” is real in urban schools like Hilltop, as Ms. Vega and her students remind us, so too is the necessity of cultivating students’ understanding of issues of power and their ability to respond to instances of injustice.

**Summary**

Within a high-stakes educational climate in which both educators in urban intensive settings (Milner, 2011) and their Latino male students are under pressure to achieve, successful teachers like Mr. Nelson are able to facilitate learning experiences for their students that are academically rigorous without stifling the joy and spirit of learning. According to Nelson’s Latino male students, his success to this end is the product of his ability to prepare them for high-stakes assessment through scaffolded support like the sharing of examples relevant to their lived experience and future goals, his passion for his
content area, and his ability to make learning fun through the use of humor. These pedagogical moves are reflective of three elements of culturally relevant, responsive, and sustaining pedagogies: academic achievement, cultural and linguistic competence and dexterity, and authentic care. Notably, Nelson’s pedagogy did not explicitly attend to the development of students’ sociopolitical awareness. With a masterful command of his discipline, an unwavering commitment to his students’ learning, and a light, humorous touch, Nelson is able to support his Latino male students in preparing to meet the demands of high school, postsecondary education, and beyond. One cannot help but wonder the heights of his students’ academic and personal growth if his practice attended, in intentional and robust ways, to his students’ ability to critique their social worlds.
Mr. Harrison, a 35-year-old self-identified White American from Rockland County, New York who has been teaching mathematics in New York City public high schools for 12 years, is the Hilltop equivalent of a “couch-surfer”—traveling between classrooms on the school’s main floor. His primary room is a bright, organized space shared by a math department colleague. Classroom bulletin boards are framed with geometry-themed trimmers in primary colors and his daughter’s drawings from preschool hang in the corner of the front whiteboard. His secondary classroom, where the majority of my time with him was spent, is, in contrast, a relatively dark space in the far corner of the eighth floor that was used for early morning professional development during my tenure at Hilltop. Flanked by Mac computers and featuring a large Promethean Board at the front, the room is the school’s technology hub. With only one period a day spent in this space shared with two other multidisciplinary colleagues, it is unsurprising that Harrison has not exactly “made it his own.” The right side of the back whiteboard is the extent of his classroom real estate. His “AIM,” “Do Now,” and homework are written daily for student reference.

While his environs, at least in his secondary classroom, may be a bit unimaginative, Harrison believes that a successful teacher is someone who “inspires curiosity in his or her students” regardless of setting. A gifted teacher, Harrison argues:

…gets students to actually want to go do their homework, to want to ask questions about the subject, and to engage in the material. You shouldn’t have to force kids to do work. You should be able to get kids to want to learn.
In order to “get kids to want to learn,” particularly in a subject area where students come in with fixed ideas about what it means to be a “math person,” Harrison believes that his “number one job is to get kids to have a positive experience with math.” Exploring this further, he notes:

I think by the time they get to high school they already have certain opinions about mathematics…They are told their whole lives that they are supposed to have some kind of mindset about math. I think they hear a lot from friends or family, like ‘I was never good at math or I was really bad at math or I was really good at math, that was my best subject.’ People don’t treat it as something that you can grow at, that everyone’s supposed to grow at math, that there shouldn’t be people that are good at math and people that are not good at math, everyone is at a certain level and everyone should be able to improve, and grow, but I think these kids, by ninth grade, already feel like they’re either bad or good.

In order to disrupt students’ preconceived notions about mathematics and their ability to succeed in this subject matter, Harrison draws on students’ innate inquisitiveness.

Describing how he approaches math in his classroom, he offers:

I think people are naturally inclined to be puzzle solvers, and I’m sure that is taken way from kids at some point in their mathematical career, so I like to treat math as a game, something that you can figure out, something that you are not supposed to memorize, or remember. It’s like we’re playing a game. It’s an art like playing music or drawing pictures, you just play with it.

For Latino male students like Santiago, an 18-year old senior from the Dominican Republic who describes his relationship with math as a “struggle,” Harrison’s approach to mathematics is refreshing. Describing Harrison’s math class, Santiago explains, “It’s simple. Mr. Harrison wants you to think. Don’t memorize. Don’t write a lot…It’s the only math class I participated in.”

Part of “thinking,” according to Harrison, is “making mistakes and learning from mistakes.” He notes:
I think it is a good day in a math classroom if kids don’t get anything right. I think that if I teach a lesson and the kid gets everything right, then the kid didn’t really learn much that day. What did they learn? How did they grow?

Accordingly, Harrison sets up his classroom so that students have the opportunity to “struggle with math” in a supportive environment. Explaining his approach, he offers:

I try to give them problems and tasks that are challenging, but that I know that they can be successful in and I think that it is important for them to find success on their own with as little input from me. Otherwise, if I just tell them how to solve the problem then they will never feel successful.

For students like Santiago, this is a vast change from math classes in the past in which “you get a problem set, get the right answer, that’s it, you’re done” and is a large part of Harrison’s appeal.

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Twenty minutes into the lesson on the quadratic formula, Harrison, dressed in a blue-checkered gingham shirt, navy slacks, and no tie—an anomaly for male teachers at Hilltop—perches on top of his desk at the front of the room. He looks at ease as he casts a glance out at an attentive audience.

“So why don’t we practice both using the quadratic formula and completing the square. I have four problems on the board. On a sheet of paper, I want you to divide it in half. On one side, I want you to solve number one by using completing the square, and on the other, by using the quadratic formula. I want you to solve each problem using both methods.” He pauses. “I also need to grade your journals, so please have them out and open to journal number one.”

A “journal” may seem like an odd assignment for a math classroom, but it is a foundational element of Harrison’s practice. In lieu of requiring students to complete
problem sets where the goal is for students to “get the right answer,” Harrison asks students to answer the “AIM” or essential question of each lesson using their classroom notes, textbook, or other sources. It is a way for both Harrison and his students to ensure that the material taught in class is being comprehended and that students are able to convey their understanding in ways that make most sense to them.

From my perch at the back-corner table, I watch as Harrison circulates the room, both checking journals for completion and assessing student progress. The periodic click of the cap of a white board marker opening and shutting— a tick that Harrison has had since I shared a classroom with him in 2010—makes me smile. After an initial lap, Harrison stops at the center table and flips through the notebook of Alex, an 18-year-old senior from the Dominican Republic with a clip-on bow tie.

“Do you think you could create your own examples when trying to answer the AIM?” Harrison asks. “What does completing the square mean to you?” he continues.

Alex, whose long hair is expertly braided in cornrows for “Senior Picture Day,” nods as Harrison closes the notebook.

Looking up, Harrison calls out, “Alright, if any one wants to put up the solution to number one—either the quadratic formula or completing the square, go up and do it. Either method.”

Brian, a Latino male student at the front left table, gravitates to the board. He begins working through the problem, stops, starts, stops again, and then steps back with his marbled composition notebook in hand and pencil behind his ear. He seems to be
attempting to solve the equation by completing the square, though I am admittedly unsure. I am hyper-aware in this moment of my rusty recollection of algebra.

Watching this elaborate choreography at the front of the room, Harrison inquires, “Brian, what happened?”

Brian hesitates before turning towards Harrison, looking a tad sheepish. “I did something wrong.”

Harrison looks Brian in the eye and moves towards the whiteboard. In a blend of sarcasm and sincerity, Harrison offers, “It's okay. I’d rather have a wrong answer than a right answer.”

“But, I…” Brian stutters as he begins to try to explain his mistake.

Sensing notes of embarrassment in Brian’s voice, Harrison stops to diffuse the tension. He places his hand on Brian’s shoulder and addresses the full class. “Okay. New rule, if you put the solution on the board, there has to be a mistake somewhere. It can’t be right. It can’t be a correct solution.”

Brian looks up and laughs. The stress dissipates from his face.

“So, if anybody has an incorrect solution for either completing the square or the quadratic formula, go ahead and put it up.”

A handful of students chuckle.

“Really?” a voice from the back questions skeptically.

“Really,” Harrison confirms with a large smile.

A girl with dark hair and glasses steps up front. She gestures to the board. “Just put up the answer?”
“No, I want to see your work. I want us to be able to analyze it to see where the mistake was made,” Harrison urges.

Over the next several minutes, a handful of students cover the white board in answers laden with “errors.” At one point, Brian raises his hand. “Can I go up again?”

“Let’s hear it for Brian, everybody!” Harrison cheers.

The class erupts in applause.

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The freedom to struggle and to make mistakes is a defining characteristic of Harrison’s practice. To create a classroom climate where students like Brian feel that it is okay to be vulnerable, to doubt and to question, requires a great deal of trust among members of the community. In Harrison’s classroom, this trust is developed through daily, strategic opportunities for students to support one another in their learning. More than in any other classroom that I have visited at Hilltop, students in Harrison’s classroom are authentically collaborating on a daily basis—working through, discussing, and presenting problems in pairs, trios, or foursomes. Drawing upon the familiar tropes of a flight attendant’s safety presentation, Harrison explains his “collaborative” pedagogical approach: “Once your oxygen mask is on, help put your neighbor’s on.” Harrison’s usage of the title “neighbor” evokes a sense of community and shared interest. He does not believe that there is a monopoly on good ideas, methods, or explanations. There are multiple ways to solve any given problem and Harrison wants students to find the “best way” for them. Speaking about the role of students as co-teachers in the classroom, Harrison reflects:
If a student sees a connection, I want them to be able to share that with other kids, because not every kid is going to see that on their own and I think that it makes more sense to kids if they can hear that connection in as many different ways as possible. For example, I always say a lot, ‘the ‘b’ value is twice the ‘a’ value.’ That’s what I would say, but every kid kept saying ‘Oh, you add ‘a’ to itself, if you add it again, you get the ‘b’ value. Like 4 plus 4 is 8’ and I would never think to say that. I always say ‘twice,’ but they always say, ‘you add it to itself,’ so I think that it is important for kids to be able to explain it like that to each other because ‘added to itself’ may not be the most mathematical way to say it, but it may make more sense to those kids.

Explaining the appeal of this approach, Ricardo, a 17-year-old Latino male senior from the Dominican Republic, offers, “I like it because sometimes the math be so difficult that it’s nice to hear what everybody thinks and maybe they say something that will help you solve the problem.” Carlos, a Dominican-American senior agrees. Drawing a comparison between Harrison’s pedagogical practice and that of other teachers, Carlos explains:

His [Harrison’s] is better because it makes you, it makes you see what your classmates are thinking about the whole thing. In some classes, they only ask three people to go up to do the ‘Do Now,’ so you only see how those three people, what answers they have. But with Harrison, you get all of the people at the table, they are all answering the same questions, so you are basically seeing their approach to that particular question.

Fernando, a senior from the Dominican Republic, confirms, “‘Cause sometimes we don’t understand what we doing so if somebody at our table understands it, we could like ask that person.”

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Harrison, dressed in a blue and red-checkered shirt, circulates the room, passing out large blue unlined index cards to each table. The air conditioner’s loud roar fills the space with noise, but not necessarily cool air. Harrison stops to tie his shoe midstride and
I notice his “World’s Greatest Dad” socks peeking out from under his navy slacks—he and his wife are expecting their second child in April of next year.

“Today we are going to practice multiplying polynomial expressions. I am passing out some problems to you guys. You are going to be passing these around the room and there is going to be a specific order to how we do that,” Harrison offers.

Stopping in the middle of the room and commanding the space like a circus ringleader, Harrison explains the order of events: “You are going to be one. When you are done with that problem, it’s going to come over here to Jovonny. Jovonny, your problem comes over here to Darlene. Darlene, you are going to pass your problem to Xavier. Xavier, you are going to hand your problem to Jorge.”

Sensing some initial confusion, Harrison reassures the class. “This will make more sense in a minute.” Students’ anxieties seem momentarily assuaged.

“Put this problem somewhere where everyone at your table can see it. I want everyone to write it down on a piece of scrap paper and then I want you to multiply expressions, check your answer with everyone at your table, make sure that everyone agrees. I will give you about two to three minutes per problem.”

At the conclusion of his instructions, students begin moving the large blue notecard to the center of the table. Some students perch with one knee on their chairs in order to get a better view. Others grab scrap paper from their notebooks. All seem to be working towards accomplishing the task that Harrison outlined.

Drawing students’ attention to the implicit, but critical goal of this activity, Harrison notes, “So, I want you to focus on different methods to do this. Are your neighbors using different methods? Try to find a method that works best for you.”
Ricardo and Jorge, an 18-year-old senior from the Dominican Republic, are working together at the back-right table. Switching effortlessly between English and Spanish, Ricardo appears to take the lead in describing his methods. Jorge taps his pencil as he follows along. I overhear “So look, I did it this way…” from my seat in the back of the room.

“Alright. Let’s switch. Let’s see if you remember our order to switch.”

With only minor confusion, students successfully move the problems in the circuit Harrison initially described.

“Now look at the back of this new problem. That’s the solution to the problem you just worked on. Now I don’t want you to just focus on the answer. I want you to look at the method to how I solved the problem. Is it different? Is it similar? Is it weird? Is it the same exact thing?”

A few audible “Oh”s can be heard around the room as students compare their work to that of Harrison. “I think I get it now!” Jorge excitedly responds.

Harrison smiles at the evidence of greater clarity. “Now after you have analyzed the solution, and you have no questions, you can move onto working through the next problem.”

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Through collaboration with peers, Latino male students like Jorge are able to have what Harrison refers to as “Oh moments”— audible signs that students have come to a deeper understanding of the relationships and patterns that are at the core of the mathematics discipline. Describing the importance of such moments, Harrison details:
I like when there is a lot of conversation amongst kids. A lot of ‘Ohs.’ Like, I like to say that I like the ‘Oh moment—Ohhhhhh!’ I always like to get kids to figure something out on their own and then eventually say ‘Oh, I see it.’ The more ‘Ohs’ I hear, the better. I think that is when I do a good job.

Though not occurring during every lesson, I have been witness to multiple “Oh moments” in my time in Harrison’s classroom. They are real-life versions of classic cartoons where a light bulb appears to go off over a character’s head. In observing Harrison, I have also noticed that these moments are not limited to discussions of mathematics. Instead, they are also evident when Harrison and students discuss “non-academic things.” Santiago describes one such moment:

…So, one day he just sat on the table and said, ‘What do you want to do in college? What is your plan?’ Like straightforward. ‘What do you want to do in life?’ That’s it and he was just listening to everything. And he was like ‘You don’t have [emphasis added] to go to college’ and he just gives you another perspective that you are not expecting a teacher to tell you. A regular teacher would just say ‘go to college, go to college.’ He would say ‘You should have a reason to go to college’ and he just talked about college and life and stuff. It’s really intriguing and it really hit me too. He’s really realistic. I definitely learned something from that conversation.

While Santiago refers to Harrison’s ability to share his own journey and life experiences as “really realistic,” Diego, a 16-year-old junior from the Dominican Republic, refers to this episode as an example of Harrison’s ability to “keep it real.” Diego discusses this quality depicted in his collage of a successful teacher (Figure 6) with Jorge and I during an afterschool meeting.

Author: What else do you have Diego?

Diego: “Keeping it real.”

Author: What does that mean?

Diego: I don’t know. To keep it 100.

Author: When you say ‘facts,’ isn’t that the same idea?
Jorge: That you can relate to what they are saying.

Figure 6. Diego’s collage of a “successful teacher”

Being “really realistic” or “keeping it real” is the quality of authenticity that Diego, Santiago, and Jorge identify as part of Harrison’s success. Further describing the impact of this characteristic of successful teachers, Santiago reflects, “Every teacher that comes to me and tells me a story that is not related to the subject, or something outside of school, about what they learned, or their reality pretty much opens my eyes. Those things stay with me.” It is clear that moments of sharing and vulnerability between Latino male students like Santiago and their teachers have the power to leave lasting impressions.

For Harrison, classroom discussions like the one referenced above are opportunities to “make a connection with your students and “to show that you care about the kids and not just about teaching them the subject.” Speaking further about his notion of care, Harrison explains:
I just don’t think that mathematics is the end-all to these students’ lives and I want them to know that that high school is not just about learning mathematics or learning English, it is about learning about yourself and what you enjoy and what you are good at. When are you happiest? How do you find happiness and what does that even mean? Do you recognize situations when you are happy and when you are not happy? I just don't think students can be successful in school if they are not happy in their lives or in a good point in their lives so I think it’s about trying to get to know them and to talk about non-math stuff.

An afterschool conversation with Ricardo, Carlos, and Santiago illuminates their views on this ability to attend to students’ lives outside of the classroom:

Author: Does it matter to you if a teacher is not just focused on the class, if they are interested in your family, in how you act outside in the community, in more than just homework and tests?

Ricardo: Yes, because you see that they are involved and not just being a teacher, but as part of your life. You kinda like see them as something else. More than just a teacher. As someone you can go to, for me in my opinion.

Carlos: Like we have school for ten straight months, like, I feel like that teacher should make an effort to be, not someone important in your life, but someone who cares.

Author: What does it mean for a teacher to care? How do you see it? What does it look like?

Ricardo: I don’t know. A vibe that they give off.

Jorge: There’s definitely a vibe.

Part of that “vibe” for students like Ricardo, Jorge, and Carlos is a feeling of respect created by a teacher’s willingness to not only be open about their own life and to express authentic interest in the lives of their students, but also to be honest and take
ownership of their own failures inside and outside of the classroom. Jorge shared with me a moment of such transparency in his relationship with Harrison:

Author: It seems like things are much better now between you and him.

Jorge: Way better. We had a talk.

Author: So, what happened?

Jorge: We had a talk. He said something to me and I gave him a death stare.

Author: Because of the fact that you thought that he was being disrespectful?

Jorge: Yeah.

Author: And then how did it resolve itself?

Jorge: And then he, I guess he felt that I was offended because of the way that I looked at him, so he came up to me and he said, ‘Jorge, I’m sorry, whatever, whatever.’ And then I said, I told him that I respect him, that that is the only reason why I didn’t, why I wasn’t disrespectful to him, but that I don’t take that from nobody.

Author: Because of?

Jorge: Because of the way that I grew up and stuff.

Author: And did he seem to understand?

Jorge: Yeah. He do. For me, since we had that talk, he seems in a better way. He is more tolerant. We have not had any issues.

Author: So, what was it about the talk that allowed you to feel better in his class?

Jorge: That he apologized.

For Jorge, Harrison’s willingness to take responsibility for how his behavior, speech, and attitude impacted him and his ability to learn within his classroom was meaningful,
particularly because he felt that his classroom behavior and response was a product of how he “grew up and stuff.” Harrison’s apology was an important attempt to acknowledge and respond to the circumstances of Jorge’s life as well as an act of willingness to “own” his part in the pedagogical partnership with his Latino male students. Speaking about the rarity of such moments in their schooling experience during an afterschool conversation, Jorge, Ricardo, and Diego offer:

Author: Do you feel like you have teachers apologize that often?

Jorge: Not really.

Author: Do you feel like teachers accept their responsibility?

Ricardo: No. They just stay stuff and that’s it. If it hurts you, it hurts you.

Author: And you are supposed to accept it as a student?

Jorge, Ricardo, and Diego: Yes.

While other teachers operate unidirectionally by just “say[ing] stuff” regardless of whether or not their words negatively affect their Latino male students, Harrison takes a more reciprocal approach. Sharing his thinking behind the apology that Jorge discussed above, Harrison reflects:

I just think Jorge, I don’t think that there was a level of mutual respect and I think for him, he’s at a point in his life where he’s about to graduate from high school and he is growing into a man, so I think he wants to be treated like a man, and I felt like I didn’t do that in class with him and I felt like I needed to tell him that I was wrong… Also, Jorge is a very low-skilled student when it comes to mathematics and I wanted him to know that I am aware of that and that I am on his side. I want him to grow in some way…I know the class is hard for him, but if he works hard he can still grow mathematically. There will be aspects in class that he benefits from…Just to let him know that I am on his side, I want him to do well, however that is defined.

Harrison’s apology was both sincere and strategic. He was sincerely remorseful of his actions that failed to demonstrate respect for Jorge and he also wanted to leverage the
power of this moment of vulnerability to support Jorge’s academic success. Discussing
the impact of such a pedagogical choice, Harrison offers, “I think it helped his
engagement in the classroom.” Jorge agrees, noting, “Since that day, I like his class every
day. I don’t know. I just do.” For Jorge and the other Latino male youth under study,
respect is paramount.

Discussion

Figure 7. Mr. Harrison’s practice as a reflection of CRRSP

Based upon observations, individual interviews with Mr. Harrison, and focus
group interviews with Latino male students within his classroom, Harrison’s pedagogical
practice is reflective of two out of the four tenets of culturally relevant, responsive, and
sustaining pedagogy as I have conceptualized it in Chapter II: 1) academic achievement,
and 2) authentic care. His observed practice was neither explicitly reflective of cultural and linguistic competence and dexterity, the third tenet of CRRSP, nor sociopolitical awareness, the fourth. As represented in Figure 7, the relationship between the two exhibited tenets, as they are enacted in Harrison’s pedagogy and in his students’ experience with his pedagogy, is dynamic and overlapping. While acknowledging and appreciating this dynamism, in the discussion below, I will address each CRRSP tenet individually and detail both if and how Harrison enacted this tenet, as well as how he, along with his Latino male students, reflected on its pedagogical value.

**Academic Achievement**

Harrison supports his Latino male students’ academic achievement through holding high expectations, attending to individual student ability, and being willing to craft lessons that provide opportunities for intentional struggle and success. While scholarship indicates that math educators of ethnic minority students too often hold low expectations of these students’ abilities (Hand, 2010) leading to a range of undesirable academic outcomes including the tracking of Black and Latina/o students into lower-level mathematics courses (Walker, 2012), Harrison believes that all students have the ability to be successful at math and that such success is not only defined by passing scores on “accepted” measures of achievement like the Algebra II Common Core state exam, but also by their ability to “grow mathematically” in ways that will be beneficial in later life like the ability to read a graph and to persist through challenging problems. In lieu of teaching as if and thus sending the message to his students that their intelligence and ability to learn math is inherent and fixed, Harrison supports students in developing a “growth mindset” (Dweck, 2006) towards the discipline of mathematics. This growth,
Harrison’s students come to understand, does not come without effort and, at times, failure. As Harrison notes:

I think it is a good day in a math classroom if kids don’t get anything right. I think that if I teach a lesson and the kid gets everything right, then the kid didn’t really learn much that day. What did they learn? How did they grow?

The enactment of this belief in the importance of making mistakes can be seen, for example, in Harrison’s lesson on the quadratic formula. Harrison responds to Brian’s admission that “I did something wrong” during a share-out in a full-class setting with a statement reflective of his encouragement of risk and of mistake-making within the classroom: “It's okay. I’d rather have a wrong answer than a right answer.” Explaining the thinking behind this comment and this approach to teaching mathematics, Harrison reflects, “For me, math is all about making kids think. You are going to have to think in life. So, getting kids to think, having them challenging themselves, having kids make mistakes and learning from mistakes.” By encouraging students to “think” and to challenge themselves, Harrison exhibits his belief in their capacity to tackle difficult work both inside and outside of the classroom.

Stemming from his view that temporary failure is a requisite element of learning, Harrison anticipates the ways in which his students will struggle and creates mechanisms of support to help students to work through these inevitable challenges. One successful support identified by his Latino male students is his use of peers. Harrison creates daily opportunities for his Latino male students to collaborate in the pursuit of greater understanding and math efficacy. For example, in his lesson on multiplying polynomials, Harrison devised an activity in which students worked through a given problem in small groups and discussed the various methods that one might use to get to the correct solution.
Harrison’s instruction, “So, I want you to focus on different methods to do this. Are your neighbors using different methods? Try to find a method that works best for you,” reflects his intentional leveraging of peer support to assist students in clarifying their thinking and identifying a mathematical approach that best suits their learning style and needs. Speaking about the impact of such a practice by drawing upon another salient example, Jorge explains:

I think that it is better to work together because like, let’s say you have the opportunity, let’s say you make a mistake, you have the help of your partner to help you identify those mistakes. It’s way better. Like today, I made a mistake in Harrison’s class and I think it was Fernando, he was like ‘It’s not 31, you got to choose the number before 31.’

Here, Jorge articulates the appeal of a teacher’s practice that provides opportunities for students to tangibly support one another’s academic engagement including identifying “mistakes” and assisting in the development of math skills. In lieu of adopting a traditional conception of youth peer groups as an obstacle to learning (Ryan, 2001) and aligned with scholarship that describes the importance of students belonging to peer groups that support their mathematical growth including Walker’s (2012) study of the positive impact of a building “mathematics learning communities” for Black and Latina/o youth in an urban high school, Harrison acknowledges the academic role peer relationships can play for Latino male adolescents. As reported in Riegele-Crub and Callahan’s (2009) study on the academic benefits of friendship ties for Latinas/os, co-ethnic peers are an important, yet undervalued source of social capital for Latina/o student academic outcomes. These peers can provide encouragement, academic support, and promote a positive cultural identity for Latina/o youth (Riegele-Crub & Callahan, 2009) as well as facilitate school adjustment (Espinoza, Gillen-O’Neel, Gonzales, &
Fuligni, 2014) and school belonging (Delgado, Ettekal, Simpkins, & Schaefer, 2016). Thus, by creating daily opportunities in which the students in his classroom can collaborate, Harrison opens up what Knight and Marciano (2013), in their description of the positive role of peers in supporting Black and Latina/o youth’s college-going, refer to as “unique sites of possibility” (p. 104)— spaces where Latino male students can partner in pursuit of academic success. Through leveraging the pedagogical power of peers, Harrison is best able to help his students to achieve.

**Authentic Care**

Care, as explained and expressed within Harrison’s practice, is characterized by a holistic view of his Latino male students and a willingness to be vulnerable and accountable for one’s actions. Harrison recognizes that his influence as an educator is greater than just as a transmitter of content knowledge. Instead, he contends that it is ensuring students’ ability to find joy and happiness within their lives and to pursue the path, both inside and outside of his classroom, that is best for them. Sharing advice for new teachers of Latino male students, Harrison offers:

I would say try to make a connection with your students. Try to learn about them, what they like, who they are outside the classroom. You know, on a quiz, make the last question ‘What are you doing?’, ‘What is something that you are excited about?’ or ‘What are you doing this weekend or what is the favorite thing you have watched in the last week?’ and try to bring those up later on. It’s an easy way to show that you care about the kids and not just about teaching them the subject. I think that there is a difference between caring about a student and caring about teaching a student.

For Harrison’s Latino male students, this desire to “care about a student,” not just “teach a student” is particularly salient. Aligned with Valenzuela (1999) and Garza’s (2009) findings that Latina/o students appreciate a teacher’s “personal interest” defined as “a
teacher’s genuine interest in getting to know her students as well as her interactions with students on a personal level” (Garza, 2009, p. 313), Harrison’s willingness to engage with “non-academic issues” and to share what Santiago calls “his own reality” is evidence of his authentic care. For example, Santiago is able to recall, in detail, a moment in which Harrison “just sat on the table” and engaged his students in a discussion about life choices and college pathways. In this conversation, Harrison participated in “college talk” (Knight & Marciano, 2013) by sharing his own journey to college and highlighted the critical decisions that need to be made around college-going, including the importance of actively and intentionally choosing to pursue postsecondary education at a given time and for a given purpose. In doing so, he also offered his students a window into his world—his fears, thought-processes, and goals. Describing the impact of such a moment, Santiago reflects, “…he just talked about college and life and stuff. It’s really intriguing and it really hit me too. He’s really realistic. I definitely learned something from that conversation.” Building on Irizarry’s (2007) findings that Latina/o youth lament the unidirectional disclosure of personal information demanded in many classrooms in which educators are able to ask students to reveal aspects of their personal lives, but are not required to reciprocate, Latino male students like Santiago are moved by such moments of personal transparency. Through the sharing of his own story, Harrison is able to develop what Stanton-Salazar (2001) refers to as confianza or “mutual trust” between himself and his Latino male students. This mutual trust enables him to help his students to risk, to be more intentional in their pursuit of their goals, and to be resilient in the face of challenges. It is through such opportunities to learn about him, that Harrison’s students are able to better learn from him.
Harrison’s efforts to share openly about his own life’s journey with his students also helps to facilitate what Jackson, Sealey-Ruiz, and Watson (2014) refer to as “reciprocal love” among and between the young men in his care. “Reciprocal love,” these scholars write, “is a deeply rooted interest in and concern for community that extends personal well-being to communal sustenance” (p. 399). In lieu of creating a classroom environment where isolated individuals engage in “parallel learning,” akin to the parallel play in which young children engage, or participate in competitive individualism, Harrison’s pedagogical moves help him to create a community of learners who are responsible for one another. Captured in Harrison’s motto for his “collaborative” pedagogical approach: “Once your oxygen mask is on, help put your neighbor’s on,” Harrison’s practice is rooted in a sense of community and shared interest. Part of being a good “neighbor” and community member is demonstrating a willingness to be held accountable by others for your actions. As exhibited in Harrison’s apology to Jorge after a moment in class in which he failed to demonstrate respect, Harrison models accountability in action. Describing his rationale, Harrison explains:

I just think Jorge, I don’t think that there was a level of mutual respect and I think for him, he’s at a point in his life where he’s about to graduate from high school and he is growing into a man, so I think he wants to be treated like a man, and I felt like I didn’t do that in class with him and I felt like I needed to tell him that I was wrong.

This gesture of vulnerability not only signals to Jorge respect for him as a student and young man and, as a result, increases his engagement in class, as indicated by Jorge’s statement, “Since that day, I like his class every day. I don’t know. I just do,” but also serves as an example of how members of this classroom community should care for one other in a spirit of “reciprocal love.” It is through such moments of transparency and accountability as well as purposeful and frequent opportunities to support one another in
pursuit of academic and personal goals that Harrison and his Latino male students are able to express and to experience authentic care.

**Cultural and Linguistic Competence and Dexterity**

In considering how Harrison’s observed pedagogy reflected the tenets of CRRSP, it is notable that it did not discernably attend to supporting students’ cultural and linguistic competence and dexterity, especially given evidence that students’ cultural and linguistic backgrounds have a demonstrated impact on the structure, discourse, and interactions present in mathematics classrooms specifically (Cobb & Hodge, 2002, as cited in Walker, 2012). While Harrison explicitly attended to students’ holistic wellbeing in the classroom by discussing, for example, life satisfaction and future goals, in my observations, Harrison’s lessons most often focused on an abstract and a-contextual mathematical object like an algebraic equation, as illustrated in the lesson in which his students like Brian practiced using the quadratic formula and completing the square to solve quadratic equations. Though this lesson, for example, supported students’ understanding of the multiple methods to solving quadratic equations, a skill necessary for success in Harrison’s classroom as well as on high-stakes assessments like the Algebra II Common Core state exam, it was neither reflective of nor rooted in students’ cultural and linguistic experiences. Harrison, when asked to consider the notion of relevancy in this lesson and others in his Algebra II curriculum, cited the pressure that he experiences to root his practice in the real-world and the constraints that he feels that the study of algebra, in particular, places on his ability to be more relevant to his students’ identities. He explains, “There is always that push to give real world examples, and I just
think it is hard to have real world examples for certain topics. You can’t make this stuff up.”

While acknowledging the difficulty that educators like Harrison may initially experience in rooting algebra in student’s lives, Moses and Cobb (2001), in their now seminal discussion of the Algebra Project, an experiential educational intervention designed to increase urban students’ mathematical literacy, provide some pathways forward. In this work, Moses and Cobb describe a lesson to help students understand the distinction between arithmetic and algebra that draws upon a central feature of life for urban youth—public transportation. In this exercise, students in Cambridge, Massachusetts area asked, “In what direction and how many stops is Park Street Station from Central Square?” (Moses & Cobb, 2001, p. 200), and then ride “the T,” the Boston subway, together to explore the concept of displacement in action as well as to practice algebraic notation and graphing on the coordinate plane. Extrapolating from this example, Leonard and colleagues (2010) describe how teachers like Harrison can adapt this lesson by using Google Maps to find their students’ neighborhood and use it as the context for learning. They write:

The distance and direction from a student’s home to school can be represented by counting the number of blocks east or west on the x-axis and north or south on the y-axis. Students can then represent the change in x and the change in y as quantities. Furthermore, students can learn the concept of slope as they examine the line that results from using their home as Point A and the school as Point B to find the rise over the run. In addition, concepts of latitude and longitude with specific degree measures can be used to differentiate the instruction further.

By adopting such an approach, educators like Harrison can help students “bridge the transition from real life to mathematical language and operations” (Moses & Cobb, 2001, p. 120). In doing so, they, in the spirit of culturally sustaining pedagogies, draw upon
students’ culture, not “as static and generalized cultural practices” (Gutiérrez & Johnson, 2017, p. 252), but instead as “the rich network of practices,” like commuting into and out of the city, “that are a part of people’s everyday lives” (p. 252).

**Sociopolitical Awareness**

Along with the absence of explicit attention to his students’ cultural and linguistic competence and dexterity, Harrison’s observed pedagogy also did not demonstrate attention to developing students’ sociopolitical awareness. For example, while Harrison emphasized his belief that “math is all about making kids think” and students engaged in mathematical skill development and collaborative problem-solving in all of his observed lessons like the lesson on multiplying polynomials, his daily lessons did not intentionally encourage his students to use mathematics as a tool to understand and critique the world around them. When asked about how he views his role in helping students to understand and act out against injustice as a part of his practice, Harrison responded, “Ideally, I would like to, but it is just hard. It is hard to incorporate that stuff into the curriculum.”

To that end, Gutstein’s (2003) study of teaching middle school mathematics to majority Mexican/Mexican-American youth in a large, Midwestern city, illustrates directions that educators like Harrison could pursue in pursuit of supporting their students’ use of mathematics as a way to “read the world” (Freire & Macedo, 1987) and to actively participate in transforming society. In this study, Gutstein describes, among other lessons centering the principles of social justice, a *Racing in Housing Data?* project in which Gutstein gave students the data for the highest median price for a house in the area at the time and then asked them to consider how they could use mathematics to determine
whether or not racism was involved in the housing pricing. One student described their response to the exercise:

First, I would find the price of a house in McFadden [the neighboring suburb in which the highest median house price could be located] and a working-class Latino’s annual income. Then I would divide the house’s price to find the annual payment. Then I would take the income and subtract the cost of living (food, clothes, etc.) and compare the difference to the house’s payments. If there is a large difference in the two, it is possible discrimination exists in the prices of McFadden because the price is impossible for most, if not all, working-class Latinos. I would say there was no racism involved if the prices were more affordable for minority groups. (p. 51)

Here, this student demonstrates how they would use mathematics to analyze a social issue like racism and to make judgements about this complex issue on the basis of data. By engaging his students in mathematical experiences such as this, when tailored specifically to the context and circumstances relevant to the students within his classroom, Harrison could better support his Latino young men in drawing connections between the mathematical ideas that are the foundation of his curriculum and their growing understanding of the world around them.

**Summary**

Given that mathematics is an area of particular concern for Latina/o students as they are consistently outperformed by other ethnic groups on standardized measures of achievement (Aud & Hannes, 2010 as cited in Riconscente, 2013, p. 6), Mr. Harrison’s ability to support his Latino male students’ academic success and sense of school belonging is worthy of documentation. Harrison’s Latino male students cite his high expectations, ability to leverage peer support, holistic interest in their wellbeing, and willingness to be vulnerable and transparent as successful elements of his practice. These pedagogic moves are reflective of two elements of culturally relevant, responsive, and
sustaining pedagogies: academic achievement and authentic care. Notably, Harrison’s observed practice, while identified as successful by his Latino male students, was neither reflective of the CRRSP tenet of cultural and linguistic competence and dexterity nor sociopolitical awareness. Thus, while Harrison’s observed pedagogy operates, as William Ayers and colleagues (2008) write, “with the faith that every child and every student appears as a whole and multidimensional being” (p. 5) in significant ways, it also prompts consideration of how educators in our nation’s cities like Harrison can better attend to the cultural, linguistic, and political dimensions of their Latino male students’ identities.
Chapter VII
DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

In light of the fact that Latina/o youth now make up one in four public school students in the United States (Fry & Lopez, 2012) and that the national high school dropout rates have indicated that Latina/o students continue to have a higher chance of exiting high school, at 12% in 2014, than their Black (7%), White (5%), and Asian (1%) counterparts (Krogstad, 2016), it is now, more than ever, important to identify the factors that contribute to a successful teaching experience for Latina/o youth. Particular attention must be paid to the education of Latino males whose proportional academic attainment continues to lag behind that of their White, Asian, and African American peers (The Schott Foundation, 2015) as well as of their Latina female counterparts (Gándara, 2017; Sáenz & Ponjuán, 2009). This sobering educational reality facing Latino males in the U.S. is indeed cause for concern, yet, I argue, is also cause for generativity, creativity, and thoughtfulness in educational research, policy, and practice. As exhibited by the young men whose reflections inform and enlighten this study, Latino male secondary students are passionate about life, about learning, and about the power of education. They have ideas as bright as their futures and they are hungry for opportunities to have a say in the educational system of which they are a part. Thankfully, as seen in the portraits of Mr. Poole, Mr. Nelson, and Mr. Harrison, there are educators in classrooms in urban areas who are willing to listen to Latino male youth and who demonstrate some of the knowledge, dispositions, and pedagogical skills needed to teach these young people well. While the practices of these educators, like the practices of all educators, are imperfect,
they offer promising examples of teaching that can support the educational potential of Latino male students. Additionally, and perhaps even more critically, the portraits of Poole, Nelson, and Harrison encourage consideration of how these three teachers and other educators in urban contexts can further support the Latino young men in their care.

Framed by critical constructivism (Kincheloe, 2005), a theoretical perspective that highlights how knowledge and phenomena like teaching and learning in urban schools are influenced by context, perspective, and power, and informed by existing scholarship on culturally relevant, responsive, and sustaining pedagogies (CRRSP) (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995a, 1995b, 2006, 2014; Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2014, 2017; Valenzuela, 1999) and student voice, this study has sought to render visible the practices of three White male teachers in one New York City public high school that their Latino male secondary students identify as successful in supporting their educational potential, as well as to consider the ways in which their practices could further support and stimulate these students’ learning and personal growth. Through classroom observations, individual interviews with the three educators whose practices are at the heart of this inquiry, and focus groups with the students whose articulations, both verbal and visual, of successful teaching tether this work to the realities of Latino male youth, I have attempted to offer a close examination of pedagogy that has the possibility to both inform and to inspire conversation and action around how to best educate Latino male youth in our nation’s cities. In the chapter that follows, I will discuss the extent to which the identified practices speak to the tenets of CRRSP— academic achievement, authentic care, cultural and linguistic competence and dexterity, and sociopolitical awareness—
and identify the contributions this work can make to our understanding of successful teaching for Latino male secondary students in urban areas across the country.

**Discussion**

***Figure 8.*** Mr. Poole, Mr. Nelson, and Mr. Harrison’s practices as a reflection of CRRSP

The practices of each of the three educators at Hilltop High School who were identified as successful by 10 Latino male students, supported students’ academic achievement and demonstrated authentic care, as I have conceptualized these terms in Chapter II. While the observed practices of two of the three educators, Mr. Poole and Mr. Nelson, addressed students’ cultural and linguistic competence and dexterity within their practice, no focal faculty member’s practices were explicitly reflective of the tenet of sociopolitical awareness. As represented in *Figure 8*, the relationship between the
demonstrated CRRSP tenets, as they are enacted in the pedagogies of Poole, Nelson, and Harrison as well as their students’ experiences with these pedagogies, is dynamic and overlapping. While acknowledging and appreciating this dynamism, in the discussion below, I will address each CRRSP tenet individually and detail both if and how the focal teachers enacted this tenet, as well as how they, along with their Latino male students, reflected on its pedagogical value.

**Academic Achievement**

Each of the ten Latino young men who participated in this study valued a teacher’s ability to support their academic achievement. Both the Latino male participants and the faculty under study acknowledged, aligned with Ladson-Billings’s (1995a) emphasis in her explication of her theory of culturally relevant pedagogy, that helping the students to become academically successful was one of their primary responsibilities. Drawing upon the language of Carlos, a 16-year-old male senior from the Dominican Republic, for Nelson, Poole, and Harrison as well as the Latino male students in their care, academics is “the point” of school and should be the central focus of high school educators.

To that end, Mr. Nelson, Mr. Poole, and Mr. Harrison each exhibited practices and articulated beliefs in the abilities and promise of Latino male students at Hilltop. Even when these students doubted their own capabilities, the educators under study reminded these young men of their capacity for success and directed them to resources that could support their growth. For example, when Jorge, an 18-year-old junior from the Dominican Republic, lamented, within a lesson on the patterns of polynomial functions,
that he was “bad with negative numbers,” Mr. Harrison was quick to highlight a moment where he used them effectively:

Harrison: See, why did you say you were bad with numbers?

Jorge: I don’t know.

Harrison: What are you doing to get better at it? Have you signed up for Khan Academy yet?

Jorge: Not yet.

Harrison: I want you sign up tonight and to search for negative numbers. The practice will help you to feel more confident.

Harrison, like Nelson and Poole, believes that no matter the skill and no matter the initial ability of the student, growth is possible. All three educators attempted to support their Latino male students in developing such a growth mindset (Dweck, 2006) towards their subject area and persisted in offering academic support until their students understood the particular content or grasped the task at hand. Aligned with Garza’s (2009) scholarship that privileges the voices of Latina/o secondary students, Latino male participants highly valued this commitment to their learning. To illustrate, describing his selection of images for his collage of a successful teacher (Figure 9), Fernando, an 18-year-old senior from the Dominican Republic, highlights the text, “Please do not let me be misunderstood.”

When asked for further clarification, Fernando offers, “Let’s say if a teacher is explaining something in class, be more specific in speaking your topic, make sure that every student understands.” Fernando’s statement on the importance of a teacher’s unwavering belief in their students’ abilities and persistence in offering assistance echoes that of a student profiled in Harper and associates’ (2012) report on the Young Men’s Initiative in New
York City, an intervention aimed at improving the educational experiences of Black and Latino young men in the city’s public schools. When asked to describe his favorite high school teacher, the young man explained: “She’s confident in what she teaches and she actually takes time to pause her lessons and help the ones who are struggling; even if they don’t get it the first time, she explains it a second time” (p. 21). Such emphasis on the clarification of tasks and commitment to understanding in both Fernando and this student’s descriptions of successful teachers for Black and Latino male students demonstrate their hunger for teaching that is both academically demanding and relentless in its support. Without the explicit and intentional coupling of high expectations and such scaffolded assistance, Latino male youth in urban schools will not be able to reach their highest potential.

![Fernando’s collage of a “successful teacher”](image)

*Figure 9. Fernando’s collage of a “successful teacher”*

**Authentic Care**

As is evident in prior scholarship on successful teaching for Latina/o secondary students that highlights the importance of authentic care (Garrett, Antrop-González, & Vélez, 2010; Garza, 2009; Halx & Ortiz, 2011; Jackson et al., 2014, Valenzuela, 1999),
the Latino male youth under study saw successful teaching as care-full teaching. For example, Jorge articulates his views on the pedagogical power of care:

I was gonna say, some way in your book, let future teachers know that let’s say a teacher comes to a school trying to be a teacher in that school, and that person doesn’t feel like he cares for them any type of way, for any reason, that person shouldn’t become a teacher in that school because we need someone that cares for us because we, I’m the first person, I’m about to go to college, and I’m the first person in my family to go to college, and our parents never went to college, my dad didn’t finish high school, my mom didn’t finish high school, we don’t have nothing to learn from them about school-related things, so we need people that care for us and they make sure they teach us things from the heart, and in a creative way.

For Jorge, the ability to care, to “teach from the heart, and in a creative way,” is a prerequisite for successful teaching. Such care is “authentic” (Valenzuela, 1999) rather than “aesthetic” in that it moves beyond surface expressions of warmth and instead embodies action. It is more than caring about Latino male students’ academic and personal well-being. Instead, it is caring for, requiring teachers to form an “ethical, emotional, and academic partnership with ethnically diverse students, a partnership that is anchored in respect, honor, integrity, resource sharing, and a deep belief in the possibility of transcendence” (Gay, 2010, p. 52). Without such care, educators will not be able to support Latino young men like Jorge in developing the knowledge and skills necessary to navigate the often-uncharted territory of postsecondary education. As a soon-to-be first-generation college student, Jorge believes that educators must be guides in the college-going process. Ricardo, a 16-year-old male senior from the Dominican Republic, echoes this sentiment, offering that a successful educator is “more than just a teacher.” Instead they are a mentor—“someone you can go to.”

All three educators whose practices were identified as successful by Latino male students at Hilltop demonstrated authentic care in the context of their classroom.
this care manifested itself in idiosyncratic ways—Harrison’s transparency, Nelson’s humor, and Poole’s patience—there were salient similarities. Each of these three educators acknowledged their Latino male students’ humanity within their practice. For example, Poole recognized that a human tendency to connect, to be in conversation and communion with those around you, was a viable rationale for the occasional side conversations in which his Latino male students engaged. Accordingly, he responded to such behavior in a spirit of understanding rather than in a spirit of anger or frustration. Hakeem, a student profiled in Howard and associates (2016) recent report on high-achieving Black and Latino males in Los Angeles referred to this pedagogical action as getting “on the student’s level” and “understanding their perspective” (p. 14). Such efforts to understand, on the part of educators like Poole, reflect a belief that teaching is more than the transmission of knowledge and the development of discrete skills. It is, instead, an interpersonal art that requires sensitivity, dedication, and compassion. As Poole notes:

A big aspect of teaching is you have to deal with human beings. It’s not just putting equations on the board. A lot of times it’s annoying, politicians and other pundits who start speaking their mind have the assumption that they could automatically do teaching and they’d be great at it, and that’s not true. If you can’t deal with the social aspects, if you can’t show you care to the kids, you are not going to be successful.

Like Rodriguez & Oseguera (2015), Poole acknowledges that for Latino male students in U.S. secondary schools, “relationships precede learning” (p. 134). Without such attention to the affective dimensions of teaching and learning, teachers of Latino male students will not be able to successfully meet their students’ relational and educational needs.
Cultural and Linguistic Competence and Dexterity

In considering the qualities of successful teachers of Latino male youth, the young men under study appreciated a successful teacher’s ability to “understand where I’m from”—the proxy most often used by students for respect for the cultural, economic, and social circumstances of their lives. A conversation between Ricardo, Fernando, Alex, and Jorge around Ricardo’s selection of images for his collage of a successful teacher (Figure 10), for example, emphasizes the value they place on a teacher’s ability to understand their background in order to “teach to and through” (Gay, 2000) their cultural strengths:

Ricardo: I put a little plane—travels or at least knows every part of the world so that he or she understands where their students come from.

Jorge: I like that. That’s my motto right there for teachers. Not even travel, you can travel to Google. If you have three students from a place, research about that place.

Ricardo: And, understand that we don’t know—we come from different places, and we had different schools that didn’t teach us the same way that other students were taught.

Fernando: Where we came from in DR, the education is not the same as it is here.

Alex: Definitely.

For these young men, a successful teacher needs to not only express interest in, but also to have knowledge of the “different places” from which students hail so that they can better “understand” how their Latino male students may experience school.
The observed practices of both Mr. Nelson and Mr. Poole demonstrated some of this understanding and leveraging of knowledge of students’ backgrounds. For example, Nelson utilized examples like credit card use that connected both to his content and to his students’ lived experiences and future goals of college-going and homeownership while Poole leveraged his Latino male students’ home language of Spanish in a lesson on scientific notation. While Harrison’s practice was in no way overtly hostile to his Latino male students’ cultural and linguistic identities, as documented in scholarship by Zanger (1994), it, in contrast to that of Poole and Nelson, did not actively and explicitly, during my observations, utilize students’ cultures and languages as vehicles for learning.

Harrison, in an individual interview, thoughtfully reflected on the barriers that he and other white, middle-class, monolingual educators may experience in adopting a pedagogical approach that foregrounds his Latino male students’ identities:

Harrison: For me it’s tough because I wouldn’t say I identify with them culturally.

We never really talk about the fact that they are Latino. Maybe we talk about being
males sometimes, but never so much about being Latino and what that means. I think it is uncomfortable for me to approach that topic with these students.

Author: Because of your own race and culture?

Harrison: Yeah. I’m a White man from the suburbs…I didn’t grow up in the inner-city or in the Bronx. I didn’t ride the city bus to school or the subway. You know I lived in a very, what I call, a safe world. I am not a minority. I am a white man and for me that is difficult when trying to relate to my Latino male students. I am always afraid that my students feel or might say that I don’t know what they are going through because I am a White man and life is a lot easier for me because of that.

Here, Harrison attempts to sociolocate—identifying how his race, class, and gender influences the ways that he is able to move about the world. He importantly acknowledges the privilege he is afforded in society as a White, middle-class, cis-gendered man and how this privilege may impact the ways in which he is read and/or heard by his Latino male students. His comments also reflect a “fear” and “discomfort” in addressing issues of race and culture that inhibits him from entering into meaningful dialogue with Latino male youth about their racial, cultural, and linguistic identities and leveraging these “funds of knowledge” (Moll et al., 1992, p. 133) in the classroom.

One strategy to overcome such barriers, according to existing literature on culturally relevant, responsive, and sustaining pedagogies, is for educators like Harrison to, drawing on the Spanish term for ethnic enclaves populated by large numbers of Latinas/os, “begin with el Barrio” (Irizarry & Raible, 2011) and tap the funds of knowledge available in students’ homes and local communities. For example, Emdin (2016), in his theory of “reality pedagogy,” speaks about how educators of urban youth of
color can learn about students’ contexts by entering their neighborhoods, houses of worship, local businesses, basketball courts, and/or community centers and engaging with youth and community members in those spaces. To ensure that their readings of their experiences in these spaces are authentic, educators who take up this work can participate in “member-checking” by honestly dialoguing in real-time with students and community actors about their impressions. These teachers can then bring such “barrio-based” knowledge and community resources back into their classrooms by inviting family members of Latino male students and local figures in to share their wisdom and expertise, by utilizing artifacts from the neighborhood as starting points for their lessons, and by creating curricular content that is directly connected to salient issues facing the community. While, as documented by both Emdin and Irizarry and Raible, this process of immersion in students’ communities is likely to provoke feelings of discomfort and vulnerability on the part of educators for whom this is new, confronting and working through such discomfort is essential to supporting urban youth. Conducting such community research in partnership with other educators at school, as Emdin documents, may provide scaffolded support for educators to engage in this important work.

Though the practices of Nelson and Poole demonstrated some of the critical understanding of students’ contexts that Emdin (2016) and Irizarry and Raible (2011) describe above, only Poole formally acknowledged and leveraged students’ linguistic background within his classroom during my observations. In describing the challenges he faces in connecting with and drawing upon his Latino male secondary students’ language within his practice, Nelson describes the restrictions that he feels that his monolingualism places on his ability to connect with his Latino male students’ cultures by comparing his
teaching to that of a “successful” former colleague at Taylor, the large comprehensive high school that was disbanded and replaced with small schools including Hilltop. He notes:

It [the use of Spanish] is very limited in my class because I know very few things. Once in a while I will throw out the term ‘que lo que’ and the kids will laugh, and they know that’s all I know. There’s a teacher that I taught with at Taylor who had a phenomenal rapport. He was Puerto Rican and he was teaching a bilingual class and I observed him once or twice and the rapport I saw him have with the students, he was able to make certain comments, say something in Spanish, and the kids would laugh because there was some sort of cultural connection with what he was saying. I think that that probably gave them a certain level of comfort that you are not necessarily going to find in a classroom with me or other monolingual white teachers. So, I think he was able to produce great stuff with those students and I don’t know if that feeling of comfort may have helped a bit.

Interestingly, while the faculty under study, like Nelson above, did not hesitate to acknowledge the value of a teacher’s ability to draw upon and to develop a students’ multilingualism in the classroom in their discussions of successful teaching for Latino male students, the Latino male student participants themselves expressed conflicting sentiments about the relative weight of a teacher’s attention to the development of their linguistic competence and dexterity in the classroom. A conversation between myself and Lucas, a 16-year-old junior from the Dominican Republic, and Xavier and Gabriel, both 16-year-old Mexican-American juniors, reflects their equivocation:

Author: How important to you, if at all, is it for a teacher to be able to speak Spanish?
Lucas: Well, I would say, because some students might not speak English very well, if the teacher speaks their language, well great, then they will understand. But I would say that I speak English very well, so I would say, that I already understand.
Author: That is really interesting. I guess for me, it’s thinking about a teacher understanding who you are and where you come from. Is knowing and being able to speak Spanish a way to understand your culture, your heritage, your family?

Xavier: No. I don’t think so.

Gabriel: Because there are people who are Hispanic that don’t know how to speak Spanish at all.

Lucas: Mmmhmmm.

Author: Fascinating— I want to us to think a little bit more about this. I am going to push gently here because I am really interested in what you have to say. So, is speaking Spanish, in your opinion, an important part of your identity? Is the fact that you speak Spanish important to you?

Choral: Yeah.

Xavier: I guess that it determines your background.

Gabriel: And when everybody has an accent, so their background, people like get to know he is Mexican, he is Dominican.

Author: But it is not important for a teacher to say that is important? Do you know what I mean? Like if that is something that is important to you, I would think that in a classroom you would want that to be valued and appreciated by your teacher. Do you feel that way?

Gabriel: Neutral.

Given the “current terrain of the American racial regime” (Alemán & Gaytán, 2016, p. 11) and the political and social climate under the current administration in which there is particular hostility to linguistic difference, there may be understandable reasons
why Latino male students like Xavier, Gabriel, and Lucas are reluctant to offer full-throated support of the necessity of a teacher respecting and leveraging their multilingualism within the classroom. Akin to the work of Alemán and Gaytán (2016) who noted the reluctance high-performing college students of color expressed when experiencing critical pedagogy for the first time, as young men living in a White-dominant world “camouflaged by color-blind and deficit discourse” (Aléman & Gaytán, 2016, p. 12) it is possible that these Latino male youth may have “internalized Eurocentric, white supremacist ideologies and are unable to imagine a worldview that acknowledges and elevates their racial and cultural identities from a lower status position to one that is worthy of discussion, let alone study” (p. 12). As Lewis (2003) observed in her study of the racial lessons conveyed, both explicitly and implicitly, to children through the curriculum and structures of three elementary schools, it is not uncommon for some youth of color to take on a persona of “racelessness” (Fordham, 1988) in order to disassociate themselves from the visible and audible identity markers that are most likely to invite stigma. Kinloch (2017) refers to this phenomenon as “performances of resistance.” This was potentially exacerbated in this study by the fact that I was a white, monolingual female researcher who conducted her interviews entirely in English. Was my own presence and privileging of English within our discussions internalized consciously or unconsciously by my Latino male student participants as a value judgement on their home language? Would these young men have been more likely to affirm the value of a teacher’s sensitivity to and support of their linguistic dexterity had I conducted the interviews in Spanish or if they had read me as an individual of Mexican or
Dominican heritage? Such questions have important implications for future educational research with Spanish-dominant youth.

**Sociopolitical Awareness**

In practice and reflection, neither the Latino male student participants nor the educators under study prioritized a teacher’s ability to develop students’ sociopolitical awareness. This is a departure from prior research on successful teaching for Latina/o high school students that indicates the importance of supporting the acquisition of skills and knowledge necessary to critique students’ social and political worlds (Cammarota & Romero, 2006; Feger, 2006; Rubin, 2014) and the value Latina/o youth place on a teacher’s ability to foster a sense of safety and security that creates the most fertile conditions for the development of this critical consciousness (Diaz-Greenberg, 2003; Zanger, 1994).

The absence of attention to supporting students’ sociopolitical awareness in both the Latino male student participants’ and faculty’s reflections on the tenets of successful teaching for Latino male secondary students speaks to the simplification of culturally relevant, responsive, and sustaining pedagogies that Sleeter (2012) laments in her work “Confronting the Marginalization of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy.” “Culturally responsive pedagogy,” Sleeter reminds readers, “is not only about teaching, but is also a political endeavor” (p. 577). Without attention to the political character of teaching for youth from historically marginalized communities, pedagogical practice cannot truly be relevant, responsive, and sustaining. Relatedly, the absence of sociopolitical awareness in the reflections and descriptions of the student participants also echoes Halx’s (2014)’s contention that many Latino male secondary students are not taught in classrooms where
challenging a social, economic, and political system that, in many powerful and lasting ways, has failed them, is commonplace. Thus, the students themselves have “only a surface awareness of their place in the world” (p. 266).

Despite, or perhaps in spite of the evidence in this study, I stand with scholars who argue that Latino male youth need to have meaningful opportunities to come to a deeper understanding of the conditions of their lives and the sociopolitical dynamics of their world. They need to develop a sense of personal and social agency in the face of linguicism, racism, and other forms of oppression that lead to the well-documented resource inequities and opportunity gaps that can hinder their educational journeys (López, 2009; McWhirter, Valdez, & Caban, 2013). Just as Harrison believes that his students must “struggle with” math, Latino male youth should be equipped with the knowledge and dispositions to “struggle against” (Gutstein, 2003, p. 41) the sociopolitical structures like unemployment and a criminal justice system that disproportionately punishes Black and Brown bodies, inadequate healthcare and housing that impinge upon their path to upward mobility, as well as an educational system that continues to track young men of color into low level courses that fail to prepare them for graduation. In a world where Latino males are so often burdened with labels of deviance and criminality (Conchas, Oseguera, & Vigil, 2012; Fergus, Noguera, & Martin, 2014; Flores-González, 2002; López, 2012), I argue that these dispositions and faculties are especially important. Through the development of a sociopolitical awareness, Latino male youth may be empowered to resist deficit-perspectives, to question inequitable structures, and to push forward with their unique strengths and unbridled potential on their paths to academic success (McWhirter & McWhirter, 2016).
In order to provide such opportunities for the development of Latino male secondary students’ sociopolitical awareness, educators like Nelson, Poole, and Harrison need to “recognize that their students, and the education they receive, are always socially and politically situated” (Dallavis, 2011, p. 270). To this end, the three educators under study did offer comments or questions within our individual interviews that reflected at least a burgeoning awareness of the sociopolitical issues that affect the Latino young men in their care. For example, in one conversation, Harrison expressed his concern about discrimination facing people of color within hiring practices by offering:

For me, a lot of things come down to jobs and careers and where students see themselves. I am always worried that when a person of color applies for a job, how does race come into play? Are they not hired because of race? Are they hired to meet a quota based on race? And I don’t really know a lot about that, but I wonder if my students ever think about that like, ‘I want to be a lawyer one day, but I look at firms and will the firms hire me just because I am Hispanic or Black, or will the not hire me because I am Hispanic or Black?’ I don’t know.

While Harrison acknowledges that he does not “really know a lot about” racial bias in hiring, he is, at a foundational level, aware of the practice and its potential impact on his students. This level of awareness, while necessary, may be insufficient in supporting Harrison to go “beyond mathematics” (Gutstein, 2003) and to ask students to engage directly with and make judgements about this issue and other societal issues based upon data within his classroom. Gutstein’s (2003) description of a project in which his Mexican and Mexican-American students utilized their mathematical knowledge of concepts like proportionality and expected value to analyze racially disaggregated data on traffic stops provides an example of the next step that educators like Harrison can take in cultivating their Latino male students’ sociopolitical awareness around issues of race. Through this work, Gutstein’s students came to the conclusion that African American and
Latina/o drivers were stopped disproportionately and then were motivated to conceive of a response to such injustice. Frankenstein (2015), in her recent discussion of the importance of “critical mathematical pedagogy” for the public good, reminds readers that the goal of such a lesson is not merely to practice, in this case, math skills, the goal is to use these skills “to understand the public interest in the issue more clearly. And, of course, the hope that is understanding the issues of our world more clearly will help those who struggle to make more justice in the world” (p. 137).

In considering the obstacles to the pedagogical approach that scholars like Gutstein (2003) outline, Harrison thoughtfully replies:

Ideally, I would like to be able to incorporate more social justice and talk about those things, but it is hard to incorporate that stuff into the curriculum…there is not a lot of stuff out there and I don’t personally understand it all myself, so I want to make sure that I can speak to what I am talking about. I don’t want to put myself in a corner where I can’t answer certain questions.

Harrison’s response reflects a desire to engage with sociopolitical issues within his classroom as well as a discomfort with unknowing that Milner (2010, 2015), Howard (2016), and other scholars committed to improving the educational experiences of youth of color document among white middle-class educators. His comments also express a hunger for more concrete examples of what the development of sociopolitical awareness for Latino male youth can look like within classrooms in all disciplines. When White educators like Nelson, Harrison, and Poole are not able to embrace the “discomfort” of discussing issues of race, they will not be able to the promote the critical consciousness and agency necessary for their Latino male students to address issues of discrimination and structural inequality that are likely to accompany these young people along their educational pathways.
Implications

This study’s pedagogical portraits of three White male teachers in one New York City public high school that their Latino male secondary students identify as successful in supporting their educational potential and subsequent analysis have important implications for the areas of educational research, policy, and practice detailed below.

Implications for Research

Future research on successful teaching for Latino male secondary students in urban areas is needed to document, in ways that are meaningful and accessible for both pre-service and in-service teachers, how effective educators develop their own cultural and linguistic competence and dexterity as well as their sociopolitical awareness along with that of their Latino male students. To this end, Ladson-Billings’s (1990) analogy that “capturing” successful teaching practices in action is akin to “trying to catch lighting in a bottle” (p. 343) is apt. Rendering visible the practices of educators who engage in the excavation and exploration of their own racial, cultural, and linguistic identities, as well as who support the cultural and linguistic integrity of Latino male youth along with the development of their critical consciousness will require a turn away from the mechanistic and technocratic view of teaching and learning that seems to dominate much of scholarly and popular discourse and instead urge researchers to (re)embrace teaching and learning as a contextual, moral, ethical, political, and cultural enterprise. It will, as Hansen (2017) eloquently writes in his recent work “Bearing Witness to Teaching and Teachers,” ask researchers to take up the quiet testimony (Goldberg, 2013) of teaching and learning—to draw attention to the familiar and often unexamined features of classroom life and
interaction that may reveal, in a poignant and powerful way, how successful educators interrogate and enact their own positionalities and biases in the classroom as well as how they are able support their students in understanding the ways in which they can both change and be changed by the world around them. This is what Eisner (1976, as cited in Hansen, 2017) refers to as connoisseurship or educational criticism—a researcher’s ability to “develop, through extensive experience and reflection, a rich and nuanced feeling for and understanding of a particular activity” (Hansen, 2017, p. 9). Given the complexity of the tenets of cultural and linguistic competence and dexterity as well as sociopolitical awareness, I argue that such sustained, critically sympathetic (Hansen, 2017) inquiry is necessary.

To this end, qualitative portraiture methodology (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1983; Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997), as operationalized in this study, is one such viable critically sympathetic approach. As a methodology, portraiture is highly relational. It is, as Lawrence-Lightfoot (2016) has recently reflected, “deep and penetrating” (p. 22)—requiring the development of extended, authentic, trusting, and respectful relationships that can support explorations of complex issues like racial identity, privilege, and power discussed above. This method of artful inquiry is also “intentionally provocative” (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2016, p. 20). Its blending of art and science and bridging of empiricism and aestheticism is designed to elicit a response from the reader that can move audiences, like those of pre-service and in-service educators, to engage in the reflection and action necessary to better serve the Latino male youth in their care. In particular, portraiture's welcoming orientation towards the inclusion of multi-modalities like the inclusion of collages of successful teaching that this study's Latino male students
created as extensions of their participation in semi-structured focus group interviews, allows qualitative portraits to be particularly evocative. Such evocation, I argue, is especially useful when considering how research can support educators at all levels in developing the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to support their Latino male students’ cultural and linguistic dexterity as well as to develop these students’ understanding of sociopolitical issues and agency in the face of systemic inequality, discrimination and oppression.

Importantly, while I call for an expansion of critically sympathetic research on the educational experiences of Latino male youth and the preparation of their educators, I understand the timely need to conduct research that can speak to multiple audiences including policy makers and a public with an insatiable appetite for quantification. Thus, while I believe that the qualitative portraiture methodology employed in this study, as an example of such a critically sympathetic research approach, afforded me a generous lens and an accessible medium through which to share the day-to-day classroom realities of Latino male students and their teachers at Hilltop, an argument could be made that the resulting portraits are neither “relevant” nor “responsive” to the language of quantitative researchers and policymakers working to improve the educational experiences of Latino male youth. As Gay (2013) writes:

> Readers of scholarship, like students interacting with teachers, may not share the authors’ priorities, points of reference, and discourse styles. Therefore, authors should be deliberate about explaining their issues of concern in ways that are understandable to others beyond their own ideological and disciplinary communities. (p. 52)

Accordingly, I ask how a research agenda could be conceived that tethers the narrative, as employed in this study, with the quantitative? How can we place conventional definitions
of “success” characterized in academic achievement outcomes like test scores and GPAs in direct conversation with narrative explorations of success that capture the nuance and the richness of classroom life and of human experience? What would be gained in approaching “The Latino Education Crisis,” as Gándara and Contreras (2009) have named it, through such an approach? Future research on successful teaching for Latino male youth should consider the viability and impact of such mixed-methods.

**Implications for Policy**

Current and future educational polices aimed at leveraging the unique potential of Latino male secondary students in our nation’s cities should attend to the voices of Latino male secondary students in both their creation and enactment in order to ensure that the policies are reflective of the specific priorities and needs of Latino young men.

*Figure 11. Gabriel’s collage of a “successful teacher”*
Drawing upon Gabriel, a 16-year-old Mexican-American junior at Hilltop’s, collage of a successful teacher (*Figure 11*), when it comes to the creation and reformation of policies that affect their ability to prosper in the classroom, in the community, and in their careers, Latino male youth want their perspectives and ideas to be considered.

As Gabriel explains:

> This kid right here, he’s thinking about his education. And like, he’s thinking about what he has upcoming, since he looks young, the future, what he wants from teachers. To be heard. It says behind the story of a student, they are always changing, learning, living fearless, and wanting to be heard.

Reflected in the slogan, “Nothing about us, without us,” Gabriel’s comments remind us that Latino male youth have a desire to be a part of any conversation around their education. Their emic perspectives are ripe with possible ways forward for educational policy that is rooted in the realities of students’ lived experiences. To this end, it is also imperative that policies that seek to expand opportunities and improve the educational experiences of Latino young men like My Brother’s Keeper Alliance, and the Expanded Success Initiative (ESI) in New York City reflect the diversity of Latino male students’ national origin, level of acculturation, migration history, socioeconomic status, as well as grade level that necessarily impact the way these youth experience school. Accordingly, I argue that a diverse group of Latino male student voices reflective of the inter- and intracultural variability within the Latino population should be solicited and privileged by policymakers who seek to ensure that their initiatives are culturally relevant, responsive, and sustaining for the Latino youth whose life opportunities they seek to expand and improve.

While I believe that the deliberate inclusion of Latino male student voice, as I have called for above, is essential to ensure that educational policies directly connect with
the unique and varied needs of this student population, these students, in the spirit of this study's theoretical framework of critical constructivism (Kincheloe, 2005) and its attention to multiple perspectives, should not be the sole source of information on how to improve their educational experiences. Instead, I argue that a broader coalition of voices should be taken into account including the views of teachers, particularly those from historically marginalized communities themselves, parents, extended kin, and community members. Through such inclusion, a more robust and well-rounded understanding of the multiple, complex, and at times, competing forces at work in educating Latino young men, can be brought to bear in the creation of educational policy designed to help Latino male youth experience the academic success of which they are both capable and deserving.

**Implications for Practice**

Finally, teacher education, both pre-service and in-service, must support educators at all levels in acquiring the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to authentically care for Latino male secondary students and to support their academic achievement, cultural and linguistic competence and dexterity, and sociopolitical awareness. Given that “a teacher’s personal history, life experiences, and sociocultural positionings deeply and somewhat firmly shape his or her consciousness” (Olsen, 2011, p. 261), teachers in all contexts should be assisted in the process of understanding themselves— their beliefs, politics, values and philosophies. Drawing upon the recent work of Villegas, Ciotoli, and Lucas (2017) on preparing teachers for classrooms that are inclusive to all students, educators must be exposed to content and engage in learning opportunities that both facilitate the development of their own cultural and linguistic competence and dexterity.
as well as their sociopolitical consciousness. In particular, both pre-service and in-service educators must be supported in growing their awareness of how society and its institutions like schools produce and perpetuate inequalities through systematic discrimination as well as their own implication in the “maintenance of these modes of oppression, and therefore, how they can disrupt them” (Ohito & Oyler, 2017, p. 185).

In considering the curricular and pedagogical levers in teacher education through which educators can be supported in developing the cultural and linguistic competence and dexterity as well as sociopolitical awareness described above, I argue that the solicitation of student voice can be used as a “disruptive strategy” (Gènor & Goodwin, 2005, p. 311) that can enable teachers to develop new ways of thinking about themselves, the society in which they are situated, and their teaching. For example, through opportunities like the Teaching and Learning Together (TLI) partnership in the Bryn Mawr/Haverford Education Program (Cook-Sather, 2009) that positions high school students as teacher educators within an undergraduate secondary certification program, educators can dialogue with Latino male youth about their experiences in school, both positive and negative, and their hopes and thoughts on what constitute successful pedagogical practices. Describing the educative power of such a partnership, a graduate of the Bryn Mawr/Haverford Education Program, former TLI participant, and current K-12 educator shared with Cook-Sather:

This project [the TLI] made me realize and remember that I was once a student and I should never detach myself from the experience of being a student and a learner. I remember [during my participation in TLI] listening to things that were affecting [my high school partner] personally, emotionally, and mentally. If I had not seen this particular view of a student, I probably would have been a teacher numb to students’ perspectives inside and outside my classroom because I never thought about students in other roles besides learners. (p. 4)
By letting students lead some of their own professional and personal learning, educators are able to challenge the “numbness” to alternate ways of experiencing the teaching and learning enterprise that can be experienced by beginning and veteran teachers alike.

The collaborative and critical work described above, however, should not be limited to preservice programs. Ongoing professional development for in-service educators like Harrison, Nelson, and Poole should both model and explicitly teach culturally relevant, responsive, and sustaining approaches (Knight, Marciano, Wilson, Jackson, Vernikoff, et al., 2016) as well as amplify the voices of Latino male secondary students through the inclusion of students as consultants or co-facilitators, student panels, and/or multimedia that privileges the voices of Latino young men. Through such work, teachers of Latino male secondary students at all levels can be inspired to ask about and attend to students’ perspectives on what works, what does not work, and what could work for them in urban classrooms and schools, and to utilize this emic knowledge to improve the educational experiences of the Latino male youth in their care. As Irizarry (2017) posits, “As the largest and fastest-growing group of minoritized students and as a community that disproportionately experiences academic underachievement, what can Latinas/o students teach us about developing teaching strategies that have the potential to improve their educational experiences and outcomes?” (p. 83).

**Limitations**

Critical constructivism, the theoretical frame for this study, as well as existing scholarship on both culturally relevant, responsive, and sustaining pedagogies and student voice, the two bodies of research to which this study seeks to contribute, are rooted in a
belief that knowledge is contextual, dialogical, and actively constructed by human beings. Thus, in considering the implications of this research, it is important to again highlight the limitations of its transferability. Just as the purpose of education for critical constructivists “is not to transmit a body of validated truths to students to memorize” (Kincheloe, 2005, p. 3), the purpose of this study is not to transmit a body of validated practices for prospective and in-service teachers of Latino male secondary students to imitate. I argue that no pedagogical recipe exists to effectively meet the needs of all Latino male youth in our nation’s cities. Accordingly, it is important to remember both this study’s static and dynamic features. The portraits rendered in this work capture teaching and learning in a particular time and place, yet they also document teachers and students in the process of “becoming” (Hansen, 2017, p. 13)—in perpetual motion in the pursuit of learning about themselves, about others, about their work, and about the world around them. Both characteristics limit the ability to generalize this study’s findings, yet do not diminish their potential influence. Like an evocative piece of art or literature, this study’s utility is in its resonance and dissonance—in the ways that educators of Latino male youth may see themselves and their classroom contexts in the created portraits as well as feel moved and provoked to consider other, different aspects of successful teaching for Latino male secondary students that may transform their work and consequently, the educational experiences of these young people.

**Conclusion**

Over the course of this study, I have been reminded again and again of the immense privilege it is to “bear witness” to teachers and teaching in urban schools
(Hansen, 2017)—to attend to the richness, complexity, and dimensionality of teaching and learning in our nation’s cities. Now back from the field, I am happy to report that despite what the media and even our own scholarly research agendas may, at times, cause us to believe, there is good in urban education. There are teachers like Nelson, Poole, and Harrison at Hilltop who are engaged, every day, in the work of educating their Latino male youth well, who are thoughtful in and reflective about their practice, and who are committed to deepening their disciplinary and pedagogical knowledge, especially after over a decade in the profession. Likewise, there are Latino young men like Ricardo and Jorge, Lucas and Fernando, who are engaged, every day, in the work of learning, who are willing partners in dialogue around improving their own schooling experiences and those of their peers, and who have a deep respect for the value of their education. Thus, while heeding the reality and urgency revealed by statistics on the educational attainment of Latino male youth across the country that framed Chapter I as well as this chapter’s introduction (Krogstad, 2016; The Schott Foundation, 2015), I argue, invoking the sentiments of Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis, (1997), that it is imperative to continue to research, document, and to illuminate what is good, what is healthy, and what is successful in urban schools and in the work of educators and Latino male secondary students. In doing so, we must also remember that what is good, healthy, and successful is neither without imperfection nor without the possibility of improvement. With such “generous and tough…skeptical and receptive” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997) goodness in mind and in our hearts, I am confident that the educational experiences of our nation’s Latino male youth will continue to improve in ways that are care-full, relevant, responsive, and sustaining.
REFERENCES


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Garza, R. (2009). Latino and White high school students' perceptions of caring behaviors are we culturally responsive to our students?. *Urban Education, 44*(3), 297-321.


Table 1: Research Questions and Data Collection Alignment Matrix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Ethnographic Classroom Observations</th>
<th>Student Semi-Structured Focus Group Interviews</th>
<th>Faculty Semi-Structured Individual Interviews</th>
<th>Written Documentation Including Syllabi and Worksheets</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. What are the practices of three white male teachers in one New York City public high school that their Latino male students identify as successful in supporting their educational potential?</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. How do these three teachers make sense of these identified practices and their success with Latino male secondary students?</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
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$\textbf{Table 2: Data Collection Matrix}$

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Collection</th>
<th>Ethnographic Classroom Observations</th>
<th>Student Semi-Structured Focus Groups</th>
<th>Faculty Semi-Structured Individual Interviews</th>
<th>Written Documentation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Data Collected from September 2016-January 2017</td>
<td>16 classroom observations (45-60 minutes each) of each of the three focal teachers for a total of 45 observations</td>
<td>2 groups of 3 semi-structured focus group interviews, each lasting 45-60 minutes, of Latino male student participants for a total of 6 interviews</td>
<td>3 semi-structured interviews with each of the three focal teachers for a total of 9 interviews</td>
<td>Multiple forms of classroom documents including worksheets and syllabi</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$\textbf{Table 3: Data Collection and Research Timeline}$

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Dates of Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dissertation Proposal Defense</td>
<td>April 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TC IRB Approved</td>
<td>June 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NYC DOE IRB Approved</td>
<td>June 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nomination of Successful Teachers by 11th and 12th Grade Latino Male Students at Hilltop High School</td>
<td>June 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finalization of Hilltop High School Faculty Participants</td>
<td>June 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Collection Including Ethnographic Observations, Faculty Interviews, Student Focus Group Interviews, and Document Collection</td>
<td>September 2016- December 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Transcription and Analysis</td>
<td>September 2016- March 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing of Chapters of Findings</td>
<td>March 2017- September 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Editing Manuscript</td>
<td>September 2017-November 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Submission of Manuscript</td>
<td>December 2017</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B

Study Participant Demographic Information *Table 4 and Table 5*

*Table 4: Faculty Participant Demographic Information*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Focal Teacher 1</th>
<th>Focal Teacher 2</th>
<th>Focal Teacher 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pseudonym</strong></td>
<td>Mr. Poole</td>
<td>Mr. Nelson</td>
<td>Mr. Harrison</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age at Time of Study</strong></td>
<td>50</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Race (Self-Identified)</strong></td>
<td>White</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cultural Identity (Self-Identified)</strong></td>
<td>Irish-American</td>
<td>American</td>
<td>American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hometown</strong></td>
<td>Toms River, New Jersey</td>
<td>Elizabeth, New Jersey</td>
<td>Rockland County, New York</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Primary Language</strong></td>
<td>English</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Years Teaching in NYC Public Schools</strong></td>
<td>20 years</td>
<td>16 years</td>
<td>12 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Area(s) of Certification</strong></td>
<td>Math and Science</td>
<td>History</td>
<td>Math</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5: Student Participant Demographic Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Age at Time of Study</th>
<th>Country of Birth (Self-Identified Cultural Identification)</th>
<th>Years Lived in the United States at Time of Study</th>
<th>Self-Identified Home Language</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alex</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Dominican Republic</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carlos</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>United States (Dominican-American)</td>
<td>Since Birth</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diego</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Dominican Republic</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fernando</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Dominican Republic</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gabriel</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>United States (Mexican-American)</td>
<td>Since Birth</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jorge</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Dominican Republic</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lucas</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Dominican Republic</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ricardo</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Dominican Republic</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Santiago</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Dominican Republic</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xavier</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>United States (Mexican-American)</td>
<td>Since Birth</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
First Individual Interview Protocol for Focal Teachers at Hilltop High School

I. General Background

*I’d like to start by getting some background information about you and your teaching career.*

1. Tell me about your personal background.
   a. Probe: Where and when were you born?
   b. Probe: How did you grow up?
2. Tell me about your educational background.
   a. Probe: What is your last completed educational level?
3. Do you speak any other languages in addition to English?
   a. Follow Up: If yes, where did you learn these languages?
5. How long have you been teaching?
   a. Probe: What did you do for employment prior to teaching?
6. What attracted you to the teaching profession?
7. When did you join the Hilltop High School staff?
8. Did you work at any other schools prior to Hilltop?
   a. Follow Up: If so, can you describe your role in these schools?
9. Have you always taught [insert content specialty]?
10. What is the best thing about teaching [insert content specialty]?
11. What is challenging about teaching [insert content specialty]?
12. How would you describe your philosophy of teaching?

II. Teaching Latino Male Students

13. When you think of Latino young men, what comes to mind?
14. When you think of *your* Latino male students, what comes to mind?
15. What kind of plans do you think your Latino male students have after high school?
16. What do you find enjoyable about teaching Latino young men?
   a. Probe: What are some of the strengths that Latino young men bring to the school?
17. What do you finding challenging about teaching Latino young men?
   a. Probe: Can you give an example of a challenge you faced when teaching Latino male students?
18. In what ways, if at all, is teaching Latino male students different than teaching students of other racial and ethnic groups?
   a. Follow Up: Can you give me a specific example?
19. In what ways is teaching Latino male students different than teaching Latina female students?
   a. Follow Up: Can you give me a specific example?
20. How do you see your role and responsibility in supporting Latino male students’ academic achievement?
   a. Follow Up: Can you give me a specific example of how you support their academic achievement?
21. How do you see your role and responsibility in supporting Latino male students’ cultural identities?
   a. Can you give me a specific example of how you support their cultural identities?
22. How do you think your cultural background influences your work with Latino young men?
23. In what ways, if at all, do you consider your Latino male students when creating your curriculum?
24. In what ways, if at all, do you consider your Latino male students when thinking about how to approach a topic?
25. Can you describe a recent conversation that you have had with a Latino male student in your class?
26. Tell me about how you interact with your Latino male students’ families and community.
   a. Prompt: Can you give an example of an interaction with your Latino male students’ families and community?
   b. Follow up: How do these interactions help inform your work with the students?
      Follow up: What challenges do you face in these interactions, and how do you accommodate them?
27. Do you live in or near your students’ community?
   a. Follow up: How does that help and/or hinder your work with the students?
28. Have you taken any coursework or professional development sessions that supported you in your work with Latino male students?
   a. Follow Up: If yes, how have they supported you?
29. What teaching advice would you give to novice teachers who have very little, or no experience at all teaching Latino male students?
30. Is there anything else that you would like to share about teaching Latino male students that we have not discussed today?

Second and Third Individual Interview Protocol for Focal Teachers at Hilltop High School

1. Could you describe yesterday’s lesson?
2. What did you hope that your students would learn by the end of the class?
   a. Follow Up: How did you hope to help them learn this?
3. What were the most successful aspects of yesterday’s lesson?
4. What were the most challenging aspects of yesterday’s lesson?
5. Thinking back on yesterday’s class, what moment stood out for you?
   a. Follow Up: What was it about that moment that stood out?
6. Could you tell me about the process that you took to devise yesterday’s lesson plan.
7. In what ways, if at all, did you consider your Latino male students, when creating your lesson plan for yesterday’s class?
8. In what ways, if at all, did you consider your Latino male students when thinking about how to approach the topic in yesterday’s lesson?
9. What strategies, if any, did you use to meet the specific needs of your Latino male students in yesterday’s lesson?
   a. Follow Up: Did you feel that the strategies that you used were successful in meeting the specific needs of your Latino male students?
10. During [section of class, e.g. groupwork, silent reading, demonstration] yesterday, I observed [description of observed practice]. Could you tell me a bit more about what you were thinking at that moment?
11. During [section of class, e.g. groupwork, silent reading, demonstration] yesterday, I observed [description of observed practice]. Could you tell me a bit more about what you were doing at that moment?
12. During [section of class, e.g. groupwork, silent reading, demonstration], I observed [description of observed practice]. Could you tell me a bit more about what your Latino male students were doing at that moment?
13. Is there anything else that you would like to share about yesterday’s class that we have not discussed today?

First Focus Group Interview Protocol with Hilltop High School Students
I. General Background
   1. What is your name?
   2. What is your age?
   3. Where were you born?
   4. How long have you lived in the United States?
   5. Do you speak any other languages in addition to English?
      a. Follow Up: If yes, where did you learn these languages?
   7. How long have you been a student at Hilltop High School?
      a. Probe: Where did you attend school before Hilltop?
   8. How would you describe Hilltop to a student who is thinking about attending?
   9. What do you like best about Hilltop High School?
  10. What do you like least about Hilltop High School?
  11. What kinds of plans do you have for after high school?

II. Being A Latino Male Student at Hilltop High School
   12. What do you think of when you think of Latino young men?
13. What do you think your teachers at Hilltop High School think of when they think of Latino young men?
14. Can you describe what it is like to be at Latino male student at Hilltop High School?
15. What is the best thing about being a Latino male student at Hilltop High School?
16. What is the most challenging thing about being a Latino male student at Hilltop High School?
17. In what ways is being a Latino male student at Hilltop High School different than being a student of another racial or ethnic group?
18. In what ways is being a Latino male student at Hilltop High School different than being a Latina female student?
19. What teaching advice would you give to teachers who have very little, or no experience at all teaching Latino male students?

III. Relationship to Focal Teacher
20. How long have you been a student in [name of focal teacher]’s class?
21. What is the first thing that comes to mind when you think of [name of focal teacher]?
22. Imagine that your friend was transferring into your [name of focal teacher]’s class. What would you tell them about [name of focal teacher]?
23. Would you consider [name of focal teacher] a successful teacher?
   a. Follow Up: What specifically makes [name of focal teacher] successful?
24. What do you like best about the way that [name of focal teacher] teaches?
25. What do you like least about the way that [name of focal teacher] teaches?
26. What, if anything, does [name of focal teacher] do that is different than what other teachers at Hilltop High School do?
27. What, if anything, does [name of focal teacher] do to support your academic achievement?
   a. Probe: Could you give me an example of something that [name of focal teacher] does that helps you to succeed academically?
28. What, if anything, does [name of focal teacher] do to support you as a Latino young man?
   a. Probe: Could you give me an example of something that [name of focal teacher] does that helps you as a Latino young man?
29. What, if anything, does [name of focal teacher] do to prepare you for the navigating the larger world?
   a. Probe: Could you give me an example of something that [name of focal teacher] does that prepares you for the navigating the larger world?
30. What, if anything, does [name of focal teacher] do to show that they care for you?
   a. Probe: Could you give me an example of something that [name of focal teacher] does that shows you that they care for you?
31. Can you describe a recent conversation that you have had with [name of focal teacher]?
32. Can you describe what it is like to be at Latino male student in [name of focal teacher]’s class?
33. In what ways, if at all, is being a Latino male student in [name of focal teacher]’s class different than being a student of another racial or ethnic group?
34. In what ways, if at all, is being a Latino male student in [name of focal teacher]’s class different than being a Latina female student?
35. In what ways, if at all, do you think [name of focal teacher] thinks about his or her Latino male students, when creating your curriculum?
36. Ten years from now, what do you think that you will remember about [name of focal teacher]?
37. Is there anything else that you would like to share about [name of focal teacher]’s class that we have not discussed today?

Second and Third Focus Group Protocol for Students at Hilltop High School

1. Could you describe what happened in [name of focal teacher]’s class yesterday?
   a. Probe: What was the AIM of the lesson?
   b. Probe: How did the lesson begin?
   c. Probe: What did you do in the middle of the lesson?
   d. Probe: How did the lesson end?
2. Imagine that your best friend was missing from [name of focal teacher’s] class yesterday and asks you what he or she missed. What would you say?
3. Thinking back on yesterday’s class, what was your favorite part?
   a. Follow Up: What about [identified part] made it [use language of student (e.g. fun, exciting, helpful, etc.)]
4. Thinking back on yesterday’s class, what was your least favorite part?
   a. Follow Up: What about [identified part] made it [use language of student (e.g. boring, unhelpful, etc.)]
5. Could you give me an example of something that [name of focal teacher] did today that you thought was successful?
   a. Follow Up: What, in particular, made ________[identified practice] successful?
   b. Follow Up: How did [identified practice] make you feel?
6. What, if anything, did [name of focal teacher] do yesterday to support your academic achievement?
   a. Probe: Could you give me an example of something that [name of focal teacher] did yesterday that helped you succeed academically?
7. What, if anything, did [name of focal teacher] do yesterday to support you as a Latino young man?
   a. Probe: Could you give me an example of something that [name of focal teacher] did yesterday that helped you as a Latino young man?
8. What, if anything, did [name of focal teacher] do yesterday to prepare you for the navigating the larger world?
   a. Probe: Could you give me an example of something that [name of focal teacher] did yesterday that prepared you for the navigating the larger world?
9. What, if anything, did [name of focal teacher] do yesterday to show that they cared for you?
a. Probes: Could you give me an example of something that [name of focal teacher] did yesterday that showed you that they cared for you?
10. During __________ (e.g. groupwork, silent reading, demonstration) yesterday, I observed ___________________. Could you tell me a bit more about what you were doing at that moment?
11. During __________ (e.g. groupwork, silent reading, demonstration) yesterday, I observed ___________________ (e.g. Could you tell me a bit more about what _______ (teacher’s name) was doing at that moment?
12. During __________ (e.g. groupwork, silent reading, demonstration) yesterday, I observed ___________________. Could you tell me a bit more about what you were thinking at that moment?
a. Follow Up: What was it about [observed practice] that made you think that?
13. During __________ (e.g. groupwork, silent reading, demonstration) yesterday, I observed ___________________. Could you tell me a bit more about how you were feeling at that moment?
a. Follow Up: What was it about [observed practice] that made you feel that way?
14. Is there anything else that you would like to share about yesterday’s class that we have not discussed today?