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# From Remediation to Acceleration: Recruiting, Retaining, and Graduating Future Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CLD) Educators

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# From Remediation to Acceleration: Recruiting, Retaining, and Graduating Future Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CLD) Educators

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**Abstract**

This ethnographic case study explores one mid-western state university's response to the challenge of culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD), especially Latino/a, student recruitment and retention. BESITOS (Bilingual/ Bicultural Education Students Interacting To Obtain Success) is an integrated teacher preparation program implemented at a predominantly White university that seeks to both increase Latino/a students' initial access to higher education and provide institutional support to facilitate a high rate of graduation. The researchers consider key elements of the BESITOS program model as they relate to and support the sociocultural, linguistic, academic, and cognitive dimensions of the CLD student biography. For each dimension, the program model is first placed in the context of existing literature on CLD student education. The key elements and strategies of the program model used to successfully meet recruitment and retention goals are then discussed.

To ensure the educational future of culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students in the United States, institutions of higher education must move from rhetoric to reality. In this study, the researchers use

*CLD* to refer to individuals who are culturally and/or linguistically different from the dominant culture/ language group in a given society. The authors opted for this term because it emphasizes the assets of individuals from diverse backgrounds as well as the diversity within ethnic/racial groups. When discussing characteristics specific to those who were English language learner students within the BESITOS (Bilingual/Bicultural Education Students Interacting To Obtain Success) Program, the authors use the term ELL to provide clarity. While some positive outcomes have resulted from the current national interest in recruiting and retaining diverse populations, an ever-increasing body of research indicates that to effect change, universities must move beyond traditional recruitment and retention (R&R) methods (Ceja, 2001, 2004; Gay, Dingus, & Jackson, 2003). This is most certainly true for Latino/a students, whose language and culture often differs greatly from the dominant population.

Many possible scenarios can affect the likelihood of a Latino/a individual attaining a bachelor's degree. Sixty-six percent of Latino/a high school graduates tend to enroll in 2-year community colleges and vocational-technical schools, as opposed to 45% of their White classmates (Harvey, 2002), making the successful transfer of Latino/a students into 4-year colleges of critical importance. Of those Latinos/as who start at a 2-year college, only 16% transfer to a 4-year college, as compared to African-American students (24%), Asian students (47%), and White students (32%) (Greene, Marti, & McCleeney, 2008). According to a national study in 2002, of the small percentage of Latino/a students who begin at a 2-year college and then transfer to a 4-year college, only 6% will graduate with a bachelor's degree (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2002). However, Latinos/as who go directly into a 4-year institution have higher graduation rate (39%) within the traditional timeframe than those who begin at a 2-year institution. While this increase in rate of graduation is noteworthy, Latino/a students still lag behind White students (57%) in attaining a bachelor's degree within the traditional 4 to 5 years (NCES, 2005). In the 2005-2006 academic year, Latinos/as overall received only 7% of the bachelor's degrees earned nationally (Excelencia in Education, 2007), yet Latinos/as represent nearly 18% of the total population of individuals in the United States aged 18-24 years (Pew Hispanic Center, 2007).

From these indicators, one resonant theme emerges: a critical call to action. This theme is aptly stated by McVay (2004):

> Meeting the wide range of differential learning needs pre-sented by a dramatically changing student population is requir-ing change not only to the curriculum but also to every aspect of postsecondary education. (p. 18)

Such change is necessary to provide educational experiences that are challenging and meaningful and that lead to success for a diverse student population that no longer fits a mold based on monocultural traditions.

Given the current scenario, it is clear that many of the nation's universities have yet to utilize the most effective avenues for pro-moting Latino/a student success. To increase the graduation rate of Latinos/as and CLD students overall, institutions of higher educa-tion (IHEs) must employ alternative methods and strategies to re-cruit and retain them. According to relevant literature, these methods and strategies should optimally address the many dimensions of the CLD student biography—sociocultural, linguistic, academic, and cog-nitive—rather than taking a one-sided approach to their educational experience (Ceja, 2001, 2004; Collier & Thomas, 1988, 1989; Gay et al., 2003; Krashen, 1991).

Furthermore, to change future outcomes for CLD students, reflec-tive educators and leaders in the field must examine the policies and procedures of IHEs that consciously or unconsciously restrict access to opportunities. IHEs must be confronted regarding their reluctance to modify or accommodate for diversity in all areas of campus life. In doing so, agents for change must consider the institutions' limited preparedness at multiple levels to effectively handle diversity as well as their unwillingness to acknowledge the institutional and interper-sonal racism frequently experienced by CLD students on their cam-puses (Gay et al., 2003; Hobson-Horton & Owens, 2004; Ladson-Bill-ings, 1999).

**Purpose of the Study**

This ethnographic case study considers one university's response to the challenge of CLD, especially Latino/a, student recruitment and retention according to a four-dimension theoretical framework, the Prism Model, which is based on the work of Collier and Thomas

(1989). BESITOS is an integrated teacher preparation program of a predominantly White mid-western university. During the 2006-2007 academic year, the composition of the university student body, excluding international students, was 3% African American, 2% Asian American, 88% White, 3% Hispanic/Latino/a, 1% Native American, 1% Multiracial, and 1% Other (with 2% No Response). Similarly, the racial/ethnic makeup of the student population in the teacher preparation program for the same year was 2% African American, 5% Hispanic/Latino/a (primarily Mexican American), and 89% White, with the remaining categories each representing 1%.

The BESITOS Program model seeks to (a) increase Latino/a students' initial access to higher education, and (b) provide institutional support to facilitate a high rate of graduation. Although this program model is specifically designed to address the needs of Latino/a students, students of other underrepresented racial/ethnic groups often are in need of similar types of opportunities and supports. As a result, the BESITOS Program attracts bilingual/bicultural students from a variety of linguistic/cultural backgrounds. White students who demonstrate (during their interview and in their personal statement) exceptional cross-cultural understandings and commitment to cross-cultural and cross-linguistic issues within education also may be considered for acceptance in the program. With the exception of two seminars (to be discussed in a subsequent section), students participating in the BESITOS Program enroll in the same courses as other students in the College of Education and are instructed by the same faculty.

The Program's R&R goal was pursued in tandem with the goal to increase the number of qualified, cross-culturally sensitive bilingual educators available to teach and support the differential learning needs of CLD students in the Midwest. To meet this goal, the Program staff recruited bilingual/bicultural participants who were first generation students or students from low socioeconomic backgrounds.

This discussion is focused on the key elements and strategies of the BESITOS Program model used to meet retention goals. The model includes methods for challenging existing institutional and/or personal barriers to CLD students' admission and supporting their transition process to higher education settings. Particular attention is given to the program's instructional treatment of social and institutional issues (e.g., racism, discrimination, poverty) that CLD students encounter at multiple levels in education. The following question guided this

study: *Which aspects of the BESITOS program proved most salient for the effective recruitment and retention of CLD students along the four dimensions of the student biography?*

## Methods

Ethnographic research can be defined as "inquiries into the social behavior of particular culture-bearing groups of people" (Wolcott, 1988, p. 189). This ethnographic case study focuses specifically on participant experiences and outcomes in a differentiated R&R program at a mid-western university. The researchers consider key elements of the program model as they relate to and support the sociocultural, linguistic, academic, and cognitive dimensions of CLD student biography.

The study utilized a closed sample of 30 undergraduate students from underrepresented groups who were recruited from five districts within the mid-western state. Of these students, 24 (80%) were CLD students and 21 (70%) entered the U.S. school system as ELL students. A majority (18) of the participants in this study were Latino/a. Other races/ethnicities represented by participants included: White (6), African American (1), Hmong (1), Iranian (1), Nepalese (1), Thai/Laotian (1), and Vietnamese (1). Twenty-two students were female; 8 were male.

The researchers collected the data as active observers over a 6-year period (2000-2006) which included participant observations, focus groups, and semistructured snowball interviews to elicit critical participant reflection and authentic participant voice (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Guba & Lincoln, 1981). The researchers also gained permission to access student academic records to contextualize students' progress during their tenure in the BESITOS Program. These records included cumulative GPA records, ACT scores, Pre-Professional Skills Test (PPST) scores, preservice/internship performance evaluations, and feedback surveys from school administrators. Participant-generated reflection journals and essays also proved a rich source of participants' perspectives on their experiences in public school and in higher education. According to the constant comparative method (Straus, 1987), the researchers initiated coding utilizing a four-dimension theoretical framework. Subsequent analysis of the data from an emic perspective enabled the emergence of participant voice, organized according to themes.

**Theoretical Framework**

The researchers used the Prism Model, which addresses the four dimensions of the CLD student biography, as the theoretical framework for this study. Collier and Thomas (1988, 1989) and Thomas and Collier (1997) developed the Prism Model to provide a holistic perspective of the differential needs and diverse assets that CLD students bring to education. The four dimensions of the Prism Model—sociocultural, linguistic, academic, and cognitive—encompass distinct but inseparable factors that reflect the background and shape the education of CLD students. Exclusive focus on merely one dimension, such as the linguistic or academic dimension, provides an inadequate understanding of a student's experiences and potential factors influencing his or her success or failure within an educational institution.

Discussion of the BESITOS Program model, strategies, and outcomes is framed by the four dimensions of the Prism Model. For each dimension of the framework, the program model is first placed in the context of existing literature on CLD student education (e.g., Baker, 1996; Cummins, 2000; Herrera & Murry, 2005; Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005; Thomas & Collier, 1997; Valencia & Solorzano, 1997). Data collected are then explored to identify guiding principles of the program model that target each dimension of the CLD *college* student biography.

**Sociocultural Dimension**

> I realize I shouldn't even be here [in college], but I am ... and for that I am very thankful. – Young Mexican American student and mother, 2005

The first and most critical dimension within the Prism Model is the sociocultural dimension. Individual and ethnic identity, family and community networks, socioeconomic status, assimilation and acculturation, exclusion and marginality, power relationships, gender roles, and mental health are just some of the factors involved in the sociocultural dimension of the CLD student biography (Baker, 1996; Ceja, 2001; Herrera & Murry, 2005; National Coalition of Hispanic Health and Human Service Organizations [NCHHSO], 1999; Palmer, 2003; Pidcock, Fisher, & Munsch, 2001; Pines & Ziadman, 2003; Valencia &

Solórzano, 1997). When considering effective R&R practices for CLD students, universities must consider such factors in every facet of the college experience.

Models of R&R in higher education often maintain traditional methods for targeting, identifying, and enrolling prospective students. While interested in tapping into the CLD student pool, universities have struggled in responding effectively to the dramatic demographic changes in the U.S. student population. Many recruitment offices have responded by simply creating bilingual flyers or brochures to be circulated (typically by White, monolingual college representatives and alumni) on campus and at high school college fairs.

Current R&R programs typically identify students using strategies such as follow-up mailings to a list of interested students or recruitment calls to identified candidates. Research in the fields of sociology, psychology, and education have argued that these methods are superficial if the goal of R&R programs is to actively recruit and connect with students from underrepresented groups (Gay et al., 2003; Johnston & Viadero, 2000). It has proven difficult for universities to move beyond the rhetoric of "recruiting for diversity." There is a need for programs to understand the dynamics of family and community and the important and unique role they play in the lives of CLD students (Ceja, 2001; Garcia, 1995; Palmer, 2003; Stanton-Salazar, 2001; Valencia & Black, 2002).

Parental involvement in decisions regarding their children's education is one key to CLD students' academic success (Ceja, 2004; Ginorio & Huston, 2001; Morse & Hammer, 1998). Contrary to popular belief, a number of researchers, such as Valencia and Black (2002), Gandara (1982), and Ceja (2001), provide strong evidence that CLD parents, in fact, do place a high value on education and see it as creating possibilities and opportunities for their children that they may not have had. Family serves as a great source of motivation and strongly influences students' decision to enter an IHE, as well as their decision to remain when faced with adversity (Ceja, 2001; Simoniello, 1981).

While valuable to students' educational outcomes, this type and level of encouragement provided to CLD students by their families and communities often differs significantly from the kinds of support (e.g., financial backing, understanding of higher education system and processes) received by many students of the majority population (Ceja, 2004; Valencia, 1991). CLD families' unfamiliarity with policies and

procedures often hinders their ability to take advantage of educational and financial opportunities for their children (Katz, Joiner, & Kwon, 2002; Montemayor & Mendoza, 2004; Schwartz, 2001). Such unfamiliarity is commonly interpreted as a lack of parental support. The sheer complexity of the processes required to access resources serves as a huge deterrent to CLD families in applying for and receiving financial support for higher education (Ginorio & Huston, 2001). Issues that are equally as complex, such as narrowly defined gender roles, are also real factors for consideration and are deeply embedded in the sociocultural biography of many CLD students (Katz et al., 2002).

### Program Findings on the Sociocultural Dimension

*Recruitment*

University recruitment programs, historically designed for the White, middle-class male, commonly ignore the culturally embedded beliefs, values, and attitudes held by the Latino population. Data from this study suggested that the BESITOS Program model takes a much more comprehensive approach, one that is grounded in the sociological and cultural experiences of the targeted demographic group. The program model is tailored to facilitate increased success in the recruitment of CLD students.

According to the data, there were several unique elements of the program model's approach to recruitment that proved effective. In this discussion, the authors will focus on the three most salient:

1. targeting/identification strategies;
2. home visits; and
3. enrollment support.

In relation to the targeting and identification of participants, BESITOS staff members conducted purposeful recruitment of those students *not* considered by their teachers and counselors as *college material*, based primarily on test scores or family history. The recruitment staff went into schools, churches, and community centers to reach students and worked to spur conversations with students and their families (in their native language) that were relevant to them and their future. This connection to the families of potential participants was a fundamental aspect of the BESITOS recruitment model.

Based on these initial connections, BESITOS staff members conducted home visits to the families. These visits provided a rich context for considering each participant and his or her sociocultural background. In an effort to build strong cultural connections with the families, home visits were made by personnel who, to the greatest extent possible, looked and talked like them. These visits also provided opportunities for trust building among the CLD student, his or her family and extended family, and the Program. The home visits better-ensured candidate buy-in as well as the parental and family support needed for retention after recruitment (Fullan, 2001; Montemayor & Mendoza, 2004).

Once students were recruited to the university, BESITOS staff implemented a third recruitment tactic with sociocultural relevance—enrollment support. CLD students and their families received support navigating the complex admission and financial aid process for entrance to the university. This was important because the majority had no prior experience with such processes. The following narrative is indicative of the experiences of the group.

> It [maneuvering around the systems of a large university] was difficult but when we were recruited, we were given our housing application, our financial aid application, our admissions, all of that. We didn't have to go out and [find] it or anything, and that made a difference.... – Mexican American student, 1999

The data suggested that participants were more capable and more confident in their navigation of university bureaucracy in their second and subsequent years, requiring less staff support related to these issues. Furthermore, based on participant responses in focus groups, third- and fourth-year students were eager to provide new students with the same kinds of guidance and support that they had received from staff in their first year.

*Monitoring and Support*

Based on exit interview data, two fundamental strategies within the support and monitoring component of the program model had a substantial impact on participants. The first, the BESITOS Advocacy Seminar, was designed as an ongoing forum for participants' critical reflec-

tion on and discussion of issues such as racism, isolation, and fear. In this seminar, program staff spurred students' thinking through provocative stories, articles, current research and events, poems, art, and literary excerpts. While one of the most powerful in terms of student outcomes, this strategy often caused Program participants and staff considerable discomfort and anxiety. Students were pushed to consider and confront complex social and cultural issues that were relevant to them, their families, their heritage, and their lives as future teachers.

In participant focus groups and individual interviews, students revealed that the Advocacy Seminar was painful at times and often made them angry as they reflected on education policy, family history, and their personal educational experiences as CLD students. In individual interviews with graduates, participants agreed that while difficult, the Advocacy Seminar not only helped them develop as adults but also supported their transition into higher education and into the teaching profession. One graduate described how she was constantly being pushed out of her comfort zone and through that experience, began to realize the importance of *advocacy*. Given the delicate and volatile nature of the seminar, the staff members' sensitivity and cross-cultural competence were of critical importance.

Staff commitment to the provision of unique, differentiated support with attention to individual participant circumstances surfaced as the second notable strategy in the monitoring and support component of the program model. Participants shared that they felt validated by Program staff who provided counseling and alternative options tailored to accommodate the students' individual situations (e.g., pregnancy, family and personal issues, financial problems).

*Retention and Beyond*

The development of strong social networks within the Program served as the pivotal strategy for retention. Program staff was made aware that "once diverse students enter an institution of higher education, social membership [much like family membership] supersedes academic membership [in importance]" (Tinto, 1987, p. 618). Within the program model, integrating participant and staff activities with the activities of the university helped participants develop a sense of school membership. *School membership* can be described as "the pro-

cess by which students are able to develop social bonds to school personnel" (Stanton-Salazar, 2001, p. 13). Stanton-Salazar (2001) asserts that these bonds create a sense of *we-ness* or collective identity that is critical for academic success. This deliberate retention strategy is employed by the BESITOS Program model to avoid the common failure of institutions to engage and socially integrate particular sectors of the student body in meaningful ways (Schwartz, 2001; Stanton-Salazar, 2001).

A final substantial finding of the study related to the sociocultural dimension of the program model is evident from the experiences of Program graduates. As student demographics have shifted in recent years, the need for culturally competent educators has increased dramatically. By giving attention to the sociocultural aspects of the student experience, the program model not only enhances participants' experience as students, but also equips them with a critical awareness of educational policy and issues of equity, discrimination, and access that serves them as teachers. Based on a qualitative survey distributed to administrators of Program graduates, feedback suggested that they are highly valued as professionals, leaders, and advocates by their principals and colleagues. All graduates interviewed felt that the quality of their work with all students was in large part a result of their experiences in the BESITOS Program.

**Linguistic Dimension**

> It is so comforting to hear Spanish being spoken in the Project offices, in seminar, and in the lab. I feel at home knowing that if it is more comfortable for me to explain something in my native language, I can. – Nicaraguan American female, 2005

Language is the currency for obtaining access to knowledge, power, and academic success in this country. As described in the literature, K-16 institutions often consider linguistically diverse students from a *deficit perspective*, assuming that they are language-deficient and therefore less capable of learning (Garcia, 1995; Herrera, 1995; Palmer, 2003; Valencia & Solorzano, 1997). Universities tend to address this perceived deficit by providing CLD students with remedial programs. The logic behind such decisions frequently is tied to the prevalent per-

ception that CLD students are a liability and intellectually incapable of comprehension at grade level (Herrera & Murry, 2005). Throughout the relevant educational literature, this view of the CLD student in schools at all levels has been shown to greatly affect the student's self-perception (Delpit, 1995; Flores, Teft Cousin, & Diaz, 1998; de la Luz Reyes & Halcon, 2001). This deficit orientation leads to a lack of success on many levels, as educators fail to appropriately accommodate the linguistic dimension of the CLD student.

Frequently, the assets CLD students bring to school are not emphasized and decisions and generalizations are made based on perceived language deficits. Although the business world recognizes the value of diversification with regard to capacity for creativity and adaptability to change, schools often fail to recognize the potential for enrichment that CLD students in the classroom and on campus can hold (Florida, Cushing, & Gates, 2002; Senge, 1997). The disjunction between school culture and home culture (sociocultural dimension) is exacerbated when teachers fail to capitalize on the strengths and assets of diverse students' languages (Garcia, 1995; Schwartz, 2001). CLD students may feel as if they cannot contribute, give back, or participate in the educative experience (Benard, 1991, 1997; Cummins, 1989).

Due to such institutional realities, first-generation ELL students often face many challenges as they strive for English fluency and academic success. Many students enter the U.S. school system with no prior experience with English. They rapidly must build both social and academic language proficiency in English to compete with their English-speaking peers (Collier & Thomas, 1989; Cummins, 1991, 1996, 2000; Herrera & Murry, 2005). The research of Garcia (1995) and Jimenez (1997) indicates that CLD students are able to expedite this construction of new English-language proficiency when they can make strategic use of both languages to construct meaning from text, which in turn leads to greater content comprehension. Although the process of second language acquisition is gradual and ongoing, many educational systems expect CLD students to function at grade level with little accommodation to curriculum or instruction and few social settings in which to develop academic language (Wong Fillmore, 1991).

### Program Findings on the Linguistic Dimension

*From Remediation to Acceleration*

While use of the native language for comprehension by CLD students is validated in the research (e.g., Herrera & Murry, 2005), the study revealed that some faculty members within the university's College of Education failed to recognize its benefits. Two participants in a follow-up interview described a situation where a faculty member approached them multiple times and asked that they not speak Spanish in class *or* in the hallways. The participants went on to say that the Program helped them in developing their ability to cope with such interactions and find their voice as advocates for CLD students. According to the literature on second language acquisition, there are basic strategies that R&R models can employ to support the linguistic dimension of the CLD student biography (e.g., targeted literacy tutoring, small-group chapter discussions, guided chapter notes in English and Spanish, allowance for peer discussion in native language) (Cummins, 1991, 1996, 2000; Garcia, 1995; Herrera & Murry, 2005; Krashen, 1991). The BESITOS Program model addresses the linguistic dimension most extensively in the area of participant monitoring and support.

Leaving behind the deficit perspective, the program model provides opportunities for participants to use their existing native language and English language skills to accelerate their learning. One essential element in the program model's treatment of the linguistic dimension is the BESITOS Literacy Seminar. This seminar is devoted solely to issues of literacy among college CLD students; this element is quite distinctive to the program model. Instructional scaffolding (the construction/integration of new concepts using previous knowledge), differentiated language support for each participant, and authentic assessments of each student's *common underlying proficiencies (CUP)* (Cummins, 1989, 2000) are critical aspects of the Literacy Seminar. Program staff provides participants in the Literacy Seminar with readings and subsequent discussions and assignments that challenge them linguistically and cognitively within the safety of the social network of the Program.

A second strategy used to support the linguistic dimension is the institutionalization of a work-study program. Provisions built into

the program model allow participating students to work part-time in the ESL office within the College of Education. There, participants are fully immersed in academic and professional language and practice. The results from the data are similar to those noted in research that posits two-fold benefits accruing from implementation of such a strategy. Astin (1993) found that providing students with opportunities to work part-time on campus aids in retention. Similarly, August and Hakuta (1997) found that exposure to faculty, staff, and students in professional settings increases not only CLD students' academic language, but also their confidence and persistence in pursuit of their degree.

Selective peer tutoring and cohorting, a third strategy in the program model's literacy focus, complements the previously mentioned linguistic benefits of the work-study experience. Within their cohort groups, CLD students who are struggling with the academic language of a particular course are paired with more-English-proficient bilingual students who can provide support and preview/ review the content in their shared native language.

As a result of such strategies, the participants experienced a great deal of academic success. The BESITOS Program requires that students hold a 2.78 GPA or higher in their coursework to maintain their scholarship. It is noteworthy that regardless of differing levels of second language literacy among the group, the average cumulative GPA of Program graduates was 3.36 on a 4-point scale (the average cumulative GPA of non-BESITOS graduates from the teacher preparation program was, for example, 3.39 in Spring 2004, the semester in which the largest number of BESITOS participants graduated). Though 21 of the 30 participants in the BESITOS Program were ELL students upon entry into U.S. schools, 96% of participants who took the Pre-Professional Skills Test (PPST) passed it. This among other quantitative data indicates the effectiveness of an authentic literacy focus.

## Academic Dimension

> To be honest, I didn't know anything about [Mid-western University] until I found out about the Program from a friend. I didn't know anything about the university system in the state or anything like that. I knew there would be some universities but I didn't know their names or where they were located. – Mexican American female student, 2004

The third dimension of the CLD student biography is the academic dimension. While the literature identifies copious factors that influence CLD students' academic success in schools, the critical component of this program model is a shift from blaming the student to empowering him or her to realize success. Herrera (1995) uses the term *pobrecito syndrome* to describe the assumption held by educators that Latinos/as are ill equipped and academically inadequate to succeed in school. Students become victims. In this context, comments such as "he did a good job for a Mexican student" or "that course would be way too hard for him" are not uncommon (Benard, 1997; Ceja, 2001; Gay, Dingus, & Jackson, 2003; Herrera, 1995; Palmer, 2003). Along similar lines, deficit statements regarding CLD students' "lack of parental support" or "lack of motivation" only feed this victimization.

As outlined in the research, many of the issues affecting CLD students in public schools continue to affect them on college and university campuses. Unfortunately, there are added layers of discrimination and elitism unique to IHEs that students must deal with in order to persist. The monocultural approach to instruction taken by many U.S. schools (K-16) presents myriad problems and inequities for those unaccustomed to a Westernized system of education (Garcia, 1995; Herrera, 1995; Nieto, 2004). Students are most affected in the areas of curriculum, pedagogy, and communication [communication to be a addressed in cognitive section] (Valencia, 1991).

With regard to curriculum, the traditional monocultural model provides students with only a limited perspective on the history and value systems of U.S. society (Baker, 1996). Moreover, the systematic compartmentalization and fragmentation of the curriculum in most schools is limiting to the capacity of not only CLD students, but that of all students, to understand the relationships among concepts (Herrera, 1995; Garcia, 1995). Furthermore, due to rigid ability grouping and other forms of tracking, students who are CLD or from low socioeconomic backgrounds rarely have access to college preparatory courses where theory, critical thinking, and synthesis skills are employed by students and teachers (Cummins, 1996; Herrera, 1995; Johnston & Viadero, 2000; Nieto, 2004).

Additionally, researchers such as Gay et al. (2003) argue that the bulk of content and pedagogy found in schools lacks cultural relevance for diverse students. Garcia (1995) and Nieto (2004) found that of-

ten the methods of teaching in schools do not include scaffolding that would effectively tie school curriculum and activities to work or to future life scenarios—although the importance of this scaffolding is well documented in the literature (Canale, 1983; Cummins, 1991; Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1999). Furthermore, the classroom environment is often competitive, a climate in opposition to normative cultural values such as collaboration and personalization held by many CLD students (Ginorio & Huston, 2001; Pidcock et al., 2001; Schwartz, 2001).

### Program Findings on the Academic Dimension

*Access and Opportunity to Learn*

With respect to the academic dimension of the CLD student biography, recruitment and retention programs must confront obstacles deeply rooted in the history of the U.S. education system. Many researchers have found that systemic flaws in the education of CLD students stem primarily from deficit thinking with regard to their abilities (Benard, 1997; Garcia, 1995; Herrera & Murry, 2005; Palmer, 2003). Based on participant voice (qualitative data) and grade point averages (quantitative data), three critical strategies related to the recruitment and retention components of the BESITOS Program model proved effective for participants' academic success: minimizing the effects of detrimental educative experiences, creating a safe and supportive academic community, and accelerating participant learning.

Unlike most recruitment programs, in this program model the staff determine a participant's selection for the program using criteria other than the student's current academic readiness and knowledge, as demonstrated via traditional measures (e.g., GPA, ACT, SAT), and focus more on the student's academic *potential* and commitment to issues of diversity. Such potential might, for example, be evidenced by the candidate's demonstrated ability to raise his or her grades in various classes from one semester to the next (regardless of overall GPA). Interviews with the candidate might also reveal extenuating family circumstances that negatively affected his or her prior academic success. Commitment to diversity often is reflected in candidate's choice of extracurricular activities and involvement in the community. Such commitment also might be evident in a candidate's desire to use his

or her experiences with coming to a new country, learning a new language, or interacting within a White-dominant society to educate future students and colleagues.

While unconventional, this type of assessment of CLD student candidates proved predictive for the participants' success in this case study, based upon their academic performance once in the scholarship program. Many participants commented on their joy and surprise at receiving the BESITOS Program scholarship. A majority of students stated that if not for the Program, they would never have gone to college or even considered it a possibility for reasons such as grades or standardized test scores. (The lowest incoming GPA for this student group was 1.1 on a 4-point scale, and the lowest ACT score was 11.)

While the BESITOS staff and student cohorts (defined student groupings for housing, courses, tutoring, and so forth) acted as strong support structures for students, mentorship relationships with other faculty served as a fundamental strategy for academic success. Participants in the study relied on these relationships for both academic and personal support. In a participant interview, one student described how she went to her mentor seeking help not only for proofreading her papers but also for dealing with personal situations. Her mentor described an incident where the student experienced discrimination when attempting to get her driver's license renewed. The mentor went to the Department of Motor Vehicles with the student and the situation was addressed and quickly resolved. This type of alternative support surfaced repeatedly in the data.

Another crucial component of the program model that supports previous research is the employment of diverse, qualified staff members to work with participants. The majority of BESITOS staff is culturally and linguistically diverse. As argued by Gay et al. (2003), meaningful relationships tend to be forged between people of similar cultural backgrounds. Therefore, it is imperative for students of color to *see themselves* on college campuses in the faculty and student body (Benard, 1997; Gay et al., 2003; National Education Association of Human and Civil Rights Department [NEAHCRD], 2001). Recruitment and retention programs, as well as colleges and universities as a whole, must increase the percentage of Latinos/as who are full-time instructional faculty and staff.

A final academic aspect of the program model highlighted by participants came from the graduates of the BESITOS Program. The

placement and follow-up of student graduates in typical recruitment and retention programs is minimal. Little professional advising is given to graduates once they have left campus to enter the field. In graduate interviews, participants considered the staff pivotal to their placement in environments supportive of CLD, and especially ELL, students. Key staff members maintained strong connections with graduates in order to provide mentoring and counseling during the critical first years of teaching. One integral strategy to promote ongoing communication is an annual gathering of Program alumni at graduation to celebrate the achievements of the new graduates. An electronic list serve moderated by the Program coordinator as well as biannual Program newsletters helps to keep alumni informed and in contact with one another throughout the year. Graduates use this network to maintain connections, support each other, and access faculty as a resource when challenges or questions arise. Additionally, follow-up classroom visits and interviews are conducted to collect participant voices, footage of high-quality teaching strategies, and feedback that will further inform the methods and strategies employed by the Program.

## Cognitive Dimension

> I am very aware that I am different here [on campus]. I think differently and I am seen as different by most. As the only Hispanic in many of my classes, it is not the same for me. . . . My teachers often think that I won't do well. – Mexican American female student, 2005

The final dimension for consideration is the cognitive dimension of the CLD student biography. While all four dimensions are interrelated, the cognitive patterns of CLD students are directly related to and are a complex result of the socialization and acculturation these students receive. Grasha (1990), in accordance with other research in the field, argues that strong cognitive and sociocultural connections exist with respect to learning styles and modes of thinking. When discrepancies exist between the modes of learning to which CLD students have been socialized and the modes of interaction in schools and universities, issues of cognition are compounded (Garcia, 1995; Gay, 2000; Herrera & Murry, 2005). Put simply, one's culture and socialization is intimately linked to how one thinks. When students' ways of knowing

are not honored or considered, they see little value for their participation in school; as a result, alienation and disconnection often occurs (Benard, 1997).

As mentioned previously, the educational history of many CLD students consists of academic tracking, low expectations, less challenging coursework that emphasizes rote knowledge, and compartmentalized treatment of content (Garcia, 1995; Ginorio & Huston, 2001; Johnston & Viadero, 2000; Palmer, 2003). CLD students' prior knowledge in content areas often is not accurately assessed and, consequently, they are not cognitively challenged or encouraged toward the acquisition of new and grade-level learning in the content areas (August & Hakuta, 1997; Herrera & Murry, 2005). Though perfectly capable, many of these CLD students are given few opportunities to develop critical thinking skills or abstract reasoning, capacities that are an outgrowth of challenging, culturally relevant coursework and rich dialogue (Baker, 1996; Cummins, 1996; Ginorio & Huston, 2001; Herrera, 1995; Nieto, 2004; Schwartz, 2001).

### Program Findings on the Cognitive Dimension

*Pushing the Limits and Rising to the Challenge*

The educational process for CLD students is laden with risks and opportunities. While all CLD students in the BESITOS Program have unique educational histories, the goal of this program model with regard to cognitive development is to push each participant to think in new and more complex ways about life, knowledge, social justice, advocacy, and the future. Moving participants beyond previous comfort levels requires understanding, fortitude, and commitment.

It is imperative that Program staff and university faculty be aware that cultural nuances and language learning issues must be considered when addressing the cognitive dimension of a CLD student's biography. Given their diverse cultures and socialization, CLD students have different paths for mental processing as well as modes of behavior that may not fit the norm in traditional classrooms. Nieto (2004) emphasizes the need for educators to be aware of how culturally specific nonverbal communication and gestures can be as well as how important they are for cognition. She asserts, "Promoting teachers' familiarity with communication differences would go a long way in

helping them transform their curriculum to address their students' background more adequately" (p. 153). In addition, the amount of wait time allowed for ELL students to respond to a question can also strongly impact their ability to process and discuss ideas and information (Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2000).

Even if participants previously have not had rich, stimulating academic opportunities, providing cognitively challenging experiences yields positive results for Program students. Through strategies such as the literacy and advocacy seminars, participants are equipped with tools to accelerate their cognitive development and overcome obstacles created by lack of access to an equitable K-12 education. The BE-SITOS Program model considers this acceleration of cognitive processes a critical component in participants' success.

Another powerful factor related to the support and retention component that promotes students' cognitive development is *mentorship* (Benard, 1991, 1997; Pines & Ziadman, 2003). With mentorship often comes what Palmer (2003) and the students in her study describe as *confianza*. *Confianza* is the presence of trust, vulnerability, and an ethos of caring in the relationship between teacher and student. BE-SITOS participants in one focus group shared that their ability to trust Program staff was one of the most important aspects of the Program. Knowing that the staff believed they could succeed was critical for students. Research has shown that students benefit developmentally from such relationships with faculty and personnel, especially when the relationships are consistent and ongoing (Nieto, 2004; Palmer, 2003; Pidcock et al., 2001).

As stated by a focus group participant, within these trusting relationships with staff members and student cohorts, students are more willing to be challenged cognitively as they rely on their "*family* to support them when it gets too tough." When students are stretched beyond the boundaries of their previous cognitive structures, having the correct supports in place enables them to flourish (Cummins, 1989, 2000; Herrera & Murry, 2005; Vygotsky, 1986). Students need opportunities to test new ideas and beliefs, practice new roles, develop new relationships at increasing levels of maturity, and ultimately work through periods of personal and intellectual conflict that are essential for change and development (McVay, 2004; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991).

**Discussion and Conclusions**

The BESITOS Program model was designed and implemented as a research-based recruitment and retention model to address the persistence gap for CLD, and especially Latino/a, students in higher education. This ethnographic case study evaluated participant response to this design, through the lens of the Prism Model, a four-dimensional theoretical framework outlining the CLD student biography. The sociocultural, linguistic, academic, and cognitive aspects of the CLD participants in the Program were further considered in light of existing literature. Based on the findings of this ethnographic study, BESITOS serves as an exemplar R&R program model that promotes CLD college student success through accommodative support and access to challenging learning experiences.

Of the 30 participants of this study, 24 (80%) were retained to graduation in the College of Education. Those retained in the College represented 75% of CLD participants and 78% of Latino/a participants. Of the remaining 6 participants, 3 (10%) went on to earn bachelor's degrees in other fields, 1 dropped out of college due to extenuating family circumstances, and 2 were dropped from the Program based on academic performance. As a result of the program model's success, the College of Education implemented four additional sister projects involving collaboration with four community colleges in the state.

BESITOS continues as a well-known program model on the midwestern university campus for its retention results, and in the community for its student advocacy and community outreach. Nationally, the mission underlying the BESITOS Program model as well as the principles that guide its practice have been highlighted through educational conferences, journal articles, and a distance-education multicultural curriculum. The impact of the BESITOS Program model extends beyond the classrooms and school districts where graduates teach, and even beyond its home state. The BESITOS Program model can serve as a framework that other universities might use to reflect on and modify practice. While its development and refinement are ongoing, the program model provides educators and practitioners with a comprehensive approach that has proven successful in meeting R&R goals for CLD students.

Banks (2000) affirms that in order to impact change, educational institutions need to "rethink, re-imagine, and reconstruct their im-

ages and representations of groups of color" (p. 105). Just as the Chicago and New York reformists of the 1980s realized that the problem lay with the school systems that served *at-risk* students, not with the students themselves, advocates and reflective practitioners must work to effect change within outdated, monocultural systems of higher education.

The preparation of K-16 educators to work effectively with CLD students is imperative. Diversity can no longer be a supplemental topic in course curricula or 1-day professional development training, but must be addressed as a fundamental reality in pedagogy and teacher-student relationships. IHEs must implement targeted reforms that address the deep-seated challenges facing CLD students. By creating culturally relevant support structures that address the sociocultural, linguistic, academic, and cognitive dimensions of the CLD student biography, universities can retain and graduate a strong and diverse corps of professionals.

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