

You Gotta Represent! Ethnic Identity Development among Hispanic Adolescents

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Hispanic students' awareness of cultural, linguistic, and sociopolitical issues are influenced by their experiences in schools and affect their sense of identity. An examination of student discourse between bilingual gifted and bilingual general education students in an urban middle school is presented, with particular attention given to how participating bilingual students relate to each other, peers (in general and gifted education), teachers, administrators, families, and communities, and how they perceive themselves. A discussion of the core issues that emerged, including students' reawakening to their ethnic identity, differing rationales for using native language, and observed differences in self-perceptions between the gifted and general education bilingual Hispanic students is provided, along with results and implications for future research.

America's classrooms have become more ethnically diverse in recent years, especially with the increase in representation of Hispanics¹ in the United States (U.S. Census, 2005). Examination of the academic

performance of ethnically diverse youth has led to increased efforts to bridge the achievement gap that exists between majority students and students of color. This discourse has centered on changing the students to fit into the current system rather than on changing the system to best meet the needs of the students. Furthermore, attempts to increase academic achievement of diverse students rarely include the voices of the very students the system is charged with serving. To better serve this population, educators must engage with these students in order to obtain a complete picture of how these learners experience school, both socially and academically, and how they perceive themselves, their peers, and school leaders.

This paper provides a window into the perceptions and experiences of two groups of bilingual Hispanic students from an urban middle school. This is a secondary analysis of data obtained from an original investigation of code-switching behaviors of gifted (GT) and general education (GE) learners who were served in English Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) at some point in their elementary education. The hypothesis of this initial study was that gifted students would have higher rates of code-switching behaviors, which could then be used in screening for intellectually gifted bilingual students. The current study focuses on the content from conversations that occurred, specifically the emergent themes of cultural expressions by bilingual students in GT and GE, which indicate variations in the development of self-identity and ethnic identity.

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¹The terms Hispanic and Latino/Latina are used interchangeably throughout this paper.

Identity Development

Developmental theories of identity formation have been proposed to describe the internal conflicts that humans experience as they progress through adolescence (Bonfenbrenner, 1989; Erickson, 1968; Marcia, 1980). These theories have focused on adolescence as a critical developmental period in which experimentation and self-understanding emerge to more formally solidify one's identity. Newman and Newman (2001) contend that greater attention should be focused on group formation and alienation during the teen years. Adolescents may be prone to alienation if they do not feel valued in a school or community. Culturally and linguistically diverse youth, who may be members of marginalized groups, are prone to experiencing alienation.

Evidence of this alienation can be found in the reported experiences of discrimination in both schools and the workplace among Latinos/as in the U.S. (Brodie, Steffenson, Valdez, Levin, & Suro, 2002; and Frankenberg & Lee, 2002). Factors that may be directly or indirectly linked to discrimination include disproportionate representation of Hispanics in special education, gifted education, and the juvenile justice system (Castellano, 2003; National Research Council, 2002; Villarruel et al., 2002). These factors may play a role in the higher dropout rate of Latino youth (Frankenberg & Lee, 2002).

The need for connection and belonging is a central component of the developmental process (Newman & Newman, 2001). Ethnicity is one of the connections that bonds individuals. Based on the premise that ethnicity plays a significant role in how youth define themselves, theories of ethnic identity development have emerged (Martin & Chiodo, 2004; Phinney, 1989). Cross (1978), Ferdman and Gallegos (2001), and Kim (1981) established models of ethnic identity development focused on adults from specific ethnic groups and how their identity conflicts were resolved. Phinney (1989) considered the development of identity specific to adolescents from multiple ethnic backgrounds; her findings indicate students of color perceived themselves similarly according to ethnic identity, whereas White students did not consider themselves as having a distinct ethnic identity other than as "Americans."

Social theorists attribute self-concept development to an individual's affiliation and experiences with particular social groups (Deaux, 1993). Within the context of social identity theory and self-categorization theory, an individual occupies multiple spaces that encompass human, social, and personal identity. How this person defines these spaces is informed by his or her interactions within and among the various groups. An individual may grapple with multiple identities informed by familial and social interactions, resulting in group memberships based on various dimensions (Sheets, 1999).

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to investigate the conversational themes of bilingual students in GT and GE to examine cultural expressions, which may indicate variations in the development of self-identity and ethnic identity.

Participants

The study originated in a southeastern state with approximately 17% of its residents claiming Hispanic ethnicity in 2000 (U.S. Census, 2000). The school district in which the study occurred reported 24% of students enrolled in kindergarten through grade 12 for the 2003–2004 school year were Hispanic, and 49% of students in the county were eligible for free or reduced price meals in 2003–2004 (Florida Department of Education, 2003). Participants were 16 middle school students from Donald Middle School² a public urban school serving students in grades 6 through 8.

Participation was sought from all students in Donald Middle School who were bilingual, who had been served in a program for English Speakers of other Languages (ESOL), and who were in either GE or GT. Following the state identification criteria, eligibility for GT requires an intelligence quotient of 130 or higher on an individually administered intelligence test. Participants were matched by grade level. Each of the groups (GE and GT) had two students in sixth grade, three in seventh grade, and three in eighth grade; years of participation in ESOL varied from 1 to 5 years. In the gifted group, 5 of the participants were females and 3 were males; in the GE group, 6 students were females and 2 were males. All students' parents were born outside the continental United States in the Caribbean, Central America, or South America, including Cuba, El Salvador, Dominican Republic, Mexico, or Puerto Rico. Parental occupations for 15 of the 16 participants were in the blue-collar sector.

Methods

Students were placed into two groups according to school services received: gifted or regular. Each group met separately with the research team for informal 1-hour discussions over 5 consecutive days. The researchers developed a series of questions (see Appendix), addressing language acquisition, expression, and cultural experiences in school. Student-initiated discussions were also encouraged, as the researchers were open to the natural progression of conversation between the students

²The names of the school and students have been changed to maintain anonymity.

in each group. The conversations took place in the school media center during the students' lunch times and were videotaped for later transcription and analysis. One of the researchers served as an observer, while another functioned as the facilitator, conversing with students in both Spanish and English to model speaking both languages in this environment. Several students asked if they were *allowed* to speak Spanish, and most did eventually once they received repeated modeling and permission to do so from the facilitator. Through debriefing following daily data collection the researchers identified issues beyond the initial scope of the study (exploring code-switching as a possible indicator for identifying intellectually gifted bilingual students). This led to further examination of the data utilizing a grounded theory perspective.

Videos from 3 days of taping (6 hours) were coded using grounded theory methodology (Charmaz, 2000; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Researchers employed multiple iterations in the analysis process. The first iteration involved a content analysis in which each video was viewed in its entirety and independently coded by the researchers. Individual codes and interpretations were then shared and discussed in order to make comparisons and determine relationships between and among specific codes. This process continued until satiation was achieved or until it was determined that further coding would not enhance the analysis.

Codes were then collapsed into key and core categories that reflected the students' experiences. In discussing individual findings, researchers were in agreement as to the nature of the codes, indicating 100% inter-rater reliability. Identified codes include communication, discrimination, culture, perceptions of socioeconomic class, education, gender issues, and intelligence. The majority of the comments were classified as communication or discrimination; thus, these two categories are the focus of this paper.

Results

Communication

The major category to emerge in the coding process was communication. This category includes nonverbal gestures, voice intonation, communication styles, views about Spanish, use of Spanish, Spanish language proficiency, and communication with friends.

Students in the GE group were initially hesitant to engage in conversations even though some were previously acquainted with each other. A sense of hesitancy and aloofness among students was evident even after an initial 30-minute ice-breaking activity. However, in subsequent meetings, students appeared to become more comfortable with each other, and a gregarious style of communication emerged, with

multiple speakers often engaging in conversations simultaneously. Discussions among this group were more representative of the communication style often observed among Latinos/Latinas (Brice, 2002), with enthusiastic challenges, supportive reciprocal statements, humorous exchanges, and a style that communicated verve and vitality. The following is a discussion among GE students that illustrates these cultural sentiments and centers on a customary nonverbal greeting:

Here they don't let you give each other a kiss. But we Hispanics are different. We come from a place where we're used to that. We greet each other that way in Puerto Rico, in Cuba, in other places. We're not used to shaking hands. We come here and we realize that it's different here and we get in trouble.

Once students in GE had established a rapport among themselves and with the facilitator, they began to assert their opinions in a confrontational, though non-threatening manner. Students spoke in a colloquial, street-savvy language, using phrases such as "that's busted" (i.e., that's not right) and one student even traversed what is often considered an educational taboo when she quoted another student who called her a "little fucking girl." Vocal intonations varied among group members, with younger female students exhibiting greater ranges, often marked by excitability and enthusiasm in the form of high-pitched laughter. Students also used emphasis to underscore the import of specific words: "I *hate* people like that, they just get on my *nerves*." Gesticulations were also punctuated with multiple non-verbal gestures, including hand gestures, hair flipping, eye rolling, and head motioning.

Students in the GT group exhibited a much different communication style as they interacted with each other and the facilitator. As with the other group, only a couple of these students had met prior to the initial meeting, but these group members appeared to become immediately comfortable with each other. Unlike the students in GE, the students in GT used a more formal, less colloquial language style when speaking either Spanish or English. More monotone, less emphatic vocal intonation patterns were evident throughout their conversations. Occasional low-key giggling and laughter were heard among these students, but for the most part voices were modulated. One student differed greatly from this group in his communication style, resembling the students in GE much more than his peer group in GT.

Students in both GE and GT indicated they still conversed in Spanish with family and friends but acknowledged feeling less facile or intimate with their mother tongue. Spanish was the native language of all but one of the participants (who was nevertheless placed in an ESOL program). While most indicated they spoke

Spanish at home, students in both groups noted their interest in relearning the language. Students in GE sought peers at school who also spoke Spanish, but the students in GT indicated they did not, for the most part, have schoolmates with whom they spoke Spanish.

Students in GT viewed the ability to speak Spanish as an occupational asset that would be highly valued in the future and would lead to greater earning potential. The ability to assist community members by translating was described as a positive experience by one student in GT. All of the students in GT believed bilingualism would lead to eventual career and financial advantages. Students in GE also viewed the ability to speak Spanish as an asset, but for a different reason: as a service to humanity; no monetary reward was mentioned as an expected outcome for translating. GE students felt a sense of pride in their bilingual talents by providing translation assistance to their parents and others in the community and school:

You are proud of yourself [because] you know two languages, and you can help people who don't know Spanish. In my first grade and third grade classes, I always had to help [with translating]. Like when I was coming down to the office, this lady didn't know how to speak English, and they were like 'does anybody speak Spanish?' and I was like 'I do.' I always help people.

Students in both GE and GT reported using Spanish to exclude specific social groups. GT learners indicated they spoke and wrote Spanish with other Hispanics for the purpose of excluding non-Spanish-speaking friends and teachers. One GT female indicated she and a peer spoke Spanish to each other in one of their classes to keep others from understanding their conversations. Similarly, an GE student also used language to exclude: "When you don't want a person to know [what you are saying], you can use [Spanish]." However, after stating to the group her purpose for using Spanish in this manner, another student gently reproached her and suggested this practice was "kinda mean." While both groups acknowledged using language for the purposes of exclusion, the students in GT discussed this practice at greater length than did the students in the GE group.

Students in GE spoke Spanish to establish social connections with peers and other Hispanics in order to establish relationships that they perceived were not available to them with non-Spanish speakers. One student noted that "in school, I mostly talk in English unless I'm talking to my friends." Consuela furthered this sentiment: "[I] speak Spanish with Spanish friends. With Whites [I] talk White, and with my teachers I'm straight [speak Standard American English]." The students in GE actively sought mentors among Hispanic peers to assist them in their quest to relearn their native language. None of the gifted students shared similar interest in seeking school

peers for the purposes of language development. Only one student in GT addressed language development, but it was from a different perspective; he identified himself as an informal Spanish language mentor to peers.

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Students in both groups were acutely aware of the overt and covert messages communicated to them by authority figures about when they should not speak Spanish. One teacher threatened to suspend a student for speaking Spanish in class; the Principal told the student body during an assembly that she was so glad they were all "speaking the right language." Both groups recognized that speaking Spanish in some situations at school or in the community may have repercussions. For example, a GT student noted that "You don't dare use Spanish at school after you are disciplined" because of the perception by teachers that the student is talking about him/her, which may lead to further negative consequences.

Some students expressed different feelings about using Spanish at school. Edward, a GT student, says he never feels "left out" anywhere in school or the community because he "can speak both languages." Conversely, John, a sixth-grade student in GE said "I only speak Spanish in my Spanish class; I speak English to my friends because when I speak Spanish, they don't understand, and it feels like I am saying *nothing* [emphasis added]."

Discrimination

A second category that emerged involved issues of discrimination, defined here as an "umbrella term referring to beliefs, attitudes, and practices that denigrate individuals or groups because of phenotypic characteristics or ethnic group affiliation" (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2001, p. 38). Both groups described experiences of discrimination by multiple and varied individuals, including peers (both Hispanic and non-Hispanic) and adults, and as a result of several factors.

All of the students in GE indicated they had experienced some form of discrimination in school. The majority of their experiences were related to ethnicity, English language proficiency, academic ability, or a

combination thereof. Students were also aware of their parents' experiences of discrimination, which the students attributed to a lack of English language proficiency. One student reported that her mother is viewed by society as being "stupid" because she is not fluent in English. However, the student is "proud of [her] mother because she tries to speak both languages." Another student recalled that his mother did not want him to experience the same discrimination she had because of her lack of English language proficiency.

My mom, she had to learn English in a special class, through ESOL . . . she wanted me to be *normal*, so that's why she didn't talk to me in Spanish, she talked to me in English to make me learn English. And then when I learned English she talked to me in Spanish (emphasis added).

Despite the fact that this child's native language was English, he was nevertheless placed in ESOL classes.

Students in GE expressed empathy toward others who experienced discrimination. Consuela described a time when her bus driver "[said] something really messed up. She's like, 'Oh, if you all came, if you all Spanish people came over here to America, you need to start talking in English.' I got mad because she shouldn't say that. It's wrong."

The bus driver also referred to a 17-year-old student who was in eighth grade: "He shouldn't be in school, he's too old . . . he's trouble." Consuela felt that he was held back due to his lack of English language proficiency. She told the driver, "He's not bad, it's not his fault [that he was still in eighth grade] . . . he came here to do better." Consuela said that the student's family had immigrated to this country in search of a better life and his lack of English language proficiency should not cause him to be negatively stereotyped.

Most of the students in GE did not feel accepted by White peers, teachers, and administrators because they were Spanish speakers. They were careful where and when they spoke Spanish. Consuela said she was not uncomfortable speaking Spanish in front of her teachers, but she "[didn't] speak it in their face." Several students indicated that they felt ridiculed by White peers when they mispronounced a word in English. John recalled feeling alienated by non-Spanish speaking peers because he had difficulties understanding and speaking English. He wondered "Do they like me?" and indicated he felt "weird" around these students.

The GE students expressed resentment for being discriminated against due to their ethnicity. Several of the students described how they had been told they were "dirty" by White students because of how they dance. Another described a time when she and several other Hispanic girls were in the hallway and she overheard a

White girl say to her friend, "Oh my God, let's get away from these ghetto people," as the White students walked by the Hispanic students. They also perceived that White students thought they were better than them: "Crean que son mucho" (they think they are all that).

The students in GE perceived themselves to be regarded as less intelligent by "White" peers because of their ethnicity and because they have Hispanic features. One student recalled "[Whites] are going around saying, 'You stupid Spicks.'" Another GE student who was placed in several honors classes noted that the majority of students in those classes were "White." She saw Hispanic peers mainly in elective courses such as physical education and music. Several students also stated that Hispanics and African Americans were over-represented in in-school suspension. They felt misunderstood by their "White" peers, but felt a connection to peers who were African American. This connection was further articulated through this discussion, as one student noted that "Blacks and Hispanics get along better now. Whites are separate."

Connections with other marginalized groups were established as students in GT discussed ethnic labels. Gabriel was quick to point out that use of the term "Mexican" is acceptable in certain company and at appropriate times much the same way as the "n-word" is acceptable with certain groups but not others. He relayed a story about an incident in which he was confronted by African-American boys in his community for using the "n" word. The tension quickly dissipated, he recalled, once he identified himself as being Puerto Rican.

Students in GT also noted having experienced discrimination mainly as a result of their ethnicity and, to a lesser extent, their English language proficiency. Discussion of discrimination among GT students was, for the most part, not specific to personal experiences. However, 3 students, Alicia, Gabriel, and Lizette, did cite specific incidents of discrimination.

Alicia described how a teacher threatened to suspend her for speaking Spanish in the classroom. She reported feeling indignant about this threat and wanting to respond to this challenge to her ethnicity, "One teacher got very upset . . . the teacher is a little racist. . . ." Not wishing to confront the teacher in front of the students, Alicia waited until the end of class to approach the teacher and speak to her in private, sharing her feelings about the inequity of her statement. She told the teacher, "You can't suspend me for speaking Spanish."

Gabriel, a gifted student who perceived himself to be viewed as a trouble-maker by teachers, administrators, and other community authority figures, has experienced discrimination in school and his neighborhood. He attributes this discrimination to his ethnicity and is hesitant to speak Spanish around authority figures, as he feels they might think he is talking about them or

“plotting some delinquent activity. If I slip in a Spanish word [when speaking to teachers or other authority figures], they might take it the wrong way. [Whites] might think I’m up to something. . . .”

Another GT student, Lizette, appears to be the least connected to her Hispanic roots. She did not claim to have any Hispanic friends and rarely used Spanish during the data collection. She also consistently defended the positions of White authority figures including those who marginalized Hispanic students. Lizette noted that if she is inadvertently grouped with other Latinos/as in the halls or other locales in school, she feels she is treated differently than when she is with White students:

Different teachers show you different respect depending on the group you are with. Sometimes I am with an entirely Spanish group, and the teachers just like yell at us for absolutely no reason. But when I am with the [gifted] class group . . . [teachers] show me respect because they know what I am really like. But since the other teachers don’t know who I am and don’t work with me like daily, they go with the stereotypes and just have no patience.

Students in GT believed their teachers had confidence in them, their ability to learn, and had high expectations of them. However, these same students recognized the prevailing view of Latino/a students’ school success: “Hispanics are not supposed to do well in school, and that’s the expectation. So if you are gifted and Hispanic, then you’ve exceeded expectations.” Although a lengthy discussion about school achievement of Hispanics was initiated by the students in GT, the only comment about achievement by the students in GE surrounded one student’s feelings of inadequacy for her label as a “slow learner.”

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Issues related to culture were discussed, both in the area of ethnic pride and ethnic differences among Hispanics and between Hispanics and Whites. Both groups were proud of their heritage and felt it their duty to respond to challenges by others, although in different ways. The students in GE were quick to point out that they felt a responsibility to react to challenges by others about their ethnicity in order not to risk being perceived as “weak.” The students in GT were less confrontational,

but, as Edward stated, “you gotta represent,” suggesting that Hispanics must assert their ethnicity.

Discussion

After examining the codes, the researchers found distinct differences between the students in GE and GT specific to communication and discrimination. As middle school students, youngsters in both groups were in the critical developmental years between elementary school and high school when identity formation is one of the most central aspects of their lives. Each group, however, appears to be experiencing this identity development differently, as was revealed during their conversations in this study. Throughout the data collection, the researchers recognized the differences in how each group indicated their ethnicity, and upon examination of the videotapes, both researchers came to recognize how distinctly different each group conveyed their identities.

Research has documented the unique Latino/a cultural communication style within informal settings among Hispanics; such exchanges are often marked by “high levels of emotional expression” (Elliott, Adams, & Sockalingam, 1999, para. 55). Conversely, formal conversations, particularly those with non-Hispanics, are usually much more deferential and low-key (Brice, 2002; Brice & Campbell, 1999; Owens, 2003). The communication style exhibited by the students in GE could easily be misconstrued by teachers and administrators. These observed exchanges, which were characterized by occasionally loud, enthusiastic, emphatic challenges, may appear to non-Hispanics as indicative of escalating, potentially dangerous behaviors. These misunderstandings may easily lead a teacher or administrator to a false conclusion about the nature of the interactions and ultimately may result in the punishment of these students for incorrectly perceived behaviors. This disconnect—or lack of cultural understanding—between school authorities and Hispanic children in schools can lead to a sense of alienation by the students, as was indicated in the discussions by both groups in this study. Part of the misunderstanding may be due to the stereotypical view of Hispanic students as gang members or delinquents (Villarruel et al., 2002). Caucasian students may also incorrectly perceive the communication style of Hispanic students as threatening, a perception that is supported by the responses from adults in the school community toward Latino/a students. In contrast, communication style of the gifted students was more like mainstream culture; they used fewer hand gestures, were more monotone, and their conversation had a more formal tone.

Communication in Spanish differed between the two groups in this study, but both groups used Spanish to exclude non-Hispanic peers in conversation. The students

in GE spoke Spanish much more frequently with each other and the facilitator during the data collection than did the students in GT. Students in GE used their native language to connect with other Hispanics. Their desire to gain language intimacy seemed a way of ensuring group membership. Their emphasis on friends who spoke Spanish wasn't because they wanted to speak the language; they spoke the language because they wanted those friends.

Both groups identified multiple examples of perceived discrimination, though the students in GE provided more personal descriptions of these events than their peers in GT. The students in GE were more subjective in their descriptions of these events, whereas the students in GT were more objective. While emotion was attached to the descriptions provided by the students in GE, the examples provided by the students in GT seemed to be more detached, even when specific examples were included.

Discrimination was more widely experienced by the students in GE than among students in GT. The students in GE identified ethnicity as the prime reason they were targeted for discrimination. Students in GT recognized the presence of discrimination, but seemed not to identify themselves as disenfranchised students. Within the framework of Jones and McEwan's (2000) identity development model, one's core, which includes personal attributes, personal characteristics, and personal identity, takes precedence over other contextual variables, such as family background, sociocultural conditions, current experiences, and career decisions and life planning, in the development of identity. As such, it may be that the students in GT identify themselves through their core attribute, their giftedness, since they have received validation from peers and adults for these intellectual gifts. This contrasts with the GE students who view themselves as Hispanics, which is the primary feature in their self-concept/ethnic identity. In an effort to reduce their perceived marginalization, these students in GE sought to become even more connected to their heritage in order to ensure group identity.

The students in GT seemed to find their primary identification, giftedness, a positive recognition, and did not seek to identify as closely with Hispanic students as did their peers in GE. This may also explain why students in GT seem to have assimilated into the mainstream culture more—as was evidenced in their more conservative dress, use of more formal language, and deemphasis of the more Hispanic mannerisms of their culture. This begs the question: Were these students identified for gifted because they followed the rules—even if they were unspoken—in downplaying their ethnicity, or are they downplaying their ethnicity as a result of their affiliation with other students of similar abilities with whom they readily connect?

Were these students identified for gifted because they followed the rules—even if they were unspoken—in downplaying their ethnicity, or are they downplaying their ethnicity as a result of their affiliation with other students of similar abilities with whom they readily connect?

This difference in group identity affiliation may explain why each group perceived or experienced discrimination differently. It may also serve as a context for understanding the continuum of ethnic affiliation exhibited among the students in the gifted group. Three of the gifted students exemplify this phenomenon. Gabriel remains in the margins due to his strong ethnic identity and cultural expression. He appears to be conflicted about where he is allowed to be a Latino and where he is allowed to be gifted, as he thinks both can't occur in the two worlds in which he traverses. Lizette may be considered the most assimilated member of the group, in some ways shunning her ethnic heritage through her more Eurocentric mannerisms and beliefs and through her outspoken support of authority. Compared to Gabriel, she represents the opposite end of the ethnic spectrum. Edward gracefully navigated a bicultural tightrope, balancing between playing by the rules of majority expectations for school behavior and social behavior, while still wanting to "represent" his ethnicity. This may explain why he behaved differently when Gabriel was present; he seemed uncomfortable with Gabriel's strong ethnic presence, becoming reserved and less vocal in those discussions.

The students' experiences of discrimination cannot be discounted. The Latina researcher who facilitated the group discussions was approached by a faculty member during the third day of taping. This person proceeded to lament how "those people" do not care about education; they "don't even bother to learn English." She summed it up by saying: "Well, you understand, you are an educated woman," as if education somehow extracts ethnicity. If these comments were made to a total stranger who is clearly from the same or similar ethnic group as the students, what messages about ethnicity are being communicated to these students?

Implications for Educators

The findings from this research suggest that educators need to be aware of the biased messages they convey

about ethnically and linguistically diverse populations. Greater effort in developing cultural competency—beyond heroes and holidays—is needed among teachers, administrators, and all students. The students’ voices also reveal recognition of systemic issues that need to be addressed, including a lack of culturally and linguistically diverse faculty, lack of access to advanced classes, and disparate discipline treatment, all of which have been addressed in the literature.

Implications for Future Research

Clearly this study is not without limitations (sample size, the location of the taping was not ideal, technical problems with the video equipment). Furthermore, the data were collected in a limited amount of time (5 consecutive days), which may have impacted the depth of the students’ discussions and the nature of their interactions.

It is important to note that the findings reported in this manuscript are not intended to be generalized. Rather, they lend support for the need to engage in additional research to further address the topics broached by the participants. Issues of communication style and how persons in authority perceive those exchanges require further exploration, as a deeper understanding and respect of cultural differences may positively impact educational outcomes for ethnically diverse students and contribute to a greater societal appreciation of unique cultures. Cultural competency continues to be a critical component in the American classroom and society. Current models for developing cultural competency do not effectively address the inherent biases surrounding current educational practice and societal beliefs in that they provide only superficial recommendations for knowledge and skills rather than addressing dispositions toward culturally and linguistically diverse children, youth, and families.

While efforts have been made to address cultural competency in school, the voices of our children are not heard, not appreciated, or are diminished so much so that to gain acceptance ethnicity must be cast off. In a society that purports to value diversity, how well are we meeting the social and academic needs of culturally diverse youth if we are not allowing our students to “represent” their ethnic identities?

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Appendix

Group Questions for Code-Switching Project

- 1) Define yourself in terms of a dual-language learner.
 - a. What is your family’s country of origin? (Mom, Dad)
 - b. How long has your family been in the United States?
- c. How many went through an ESOL program?
- d. How long ago?
- e. How did you feel about the ESOL program?
- f. How do you feel about being a speaker of 2 languages?
- g. Has it ever made you feel different? When? Recall a time.
- 2) Do you ever switch back and forth between English and another language?
 - a. Why?
 - b. When?
 - c. With whom?
 - d. Is there ever a time when you choose not to code switch?
- 3) Do you ever “retreat” to your Spanish?
- 4) How does being bilingual affect you academically? Can you think of examples? (Discuss experiences in small groups.)
- 5) Who are your friends? Are they bilingual?
- 6) Are you comfortable code switching at school? Out of school? Around grown-ups? Around teachers?
- 7) How has being bilingual affected your personality? (Give examples in small groups.)
- 8) What can you tell us as adults that we could do to make this world a better place?
- 9) What would you like to see change in the world? In Tampa? In your community? In this school?

