

5-2023

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**Impact of Culture on Students' Academic Achievement in the Classroom**

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Spring 2023

**Senior Capstone**

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### **Abstract**

This capstone research seeks to reflect how culture can impact student academic achievement. Understanding that culture has many meanings is critical to have an insight into how it can impact student, classroom, and teacher-student interactions. To carry this, four teachers/ Professors were interviewed, and student surveys were created. Understanding that culture is part of students' identity is essential, also how family finances influence them, a welcoming environment, and creating relationships of care and trust impact students' academic achievement. Finding a way to bring everyone together for cultural understanding is essential, and understanding how culturally sustainable pedagogies can help students. Culture influences student aspirations, and if students feel that they are not taken into account or not expected to succeed, they will probably feel less care for their academic outcomes.

**Keywords: Culture, academic achievement, students, teachers, impact**

## Introduction and Background

My interest in developing this research paper arises first from personal experiences as an immigrant who start high school in a new country with different systems, beliefs, language, and practices. Also, from multiple courses and pedagogies that stands the importance of creating the notion that having a sustainable cultural pedagogy is critical to the success of students and also that culture is part of the development of students. In the past traditional pedagogies have contributed to the disparity between the academic achievement of diverse students and perpetuated inequalities in the educational system. Because traditional perspectives have resulted in preventing bicultural students from understanding their world by silent their voices, limiting the connection of their experiences with what is taught in schools (Darder, 2012). Therefore, students need to see their culture being valued and respected in the place they learn. If not, as Smith-Maddox's studies showed, the U.S. educational system will continue to structure inequality because students will be constrained by a school culture that is alienated and inconsistent with their cultural experiences, hopes, dreams, and struggles (Smith- Maddox, 1998). Thus this project seeks to understand the disparity and inequality in the educational system that are related to cultural differences.

Each student brings uniqueness to schools when educators, parents, and policymakers understand how these contribute to their achievement; culture being one of those factors, fair and equitable practices can be developed to benefit the students (Arbelo, 2016). Sustainable teaching pedagogies practices are being expressed as key to students' success. When students are able to adapt to the dominant culture and at the same time maintain their cultural heritage, they are more successful academically (Makarova & Birman, 2015). This nation is constructed of people from different backgrounds, precedents of various countries, and cultures that shape their customs,

attitude, and perspective. Therefore as Gay (2013) argues, “the education of racially, ethnically, and culturally diverse students should connect in-school learning to out-of-school living; promote educational equity and excellence; create community among individuals from different cultural, social, and ethnic backgrounds...” (p. 3). To promote the academic achievement of diverse students, there needs to be an understanding of student backgrounds and use these to create quality teaching based on an ethical disposition that respects and values cultural diversity and uses cultural knowledge as a teaching tool (Boon, 2016). For these reasons, this research hopes to understand how culture can be valued to help students reach academic achievement or how culture impacts them because “Schools that cannot convey appropriate messages and affect policies that are relevant to their populations will negatively impact the school community and serve as barriers to student success” (Arbelo, 2016, p. 181). Therefore, it is essential to understand the role of culture in students' education. To accomplish this, a series of questions are being developed. The focus of this paper revolves around the primary research question, “How do student cultures impact their academic achievement in the classroom?” To see the answer to this central question, a series of secondary questions is presented.

1. What is culture? What does it entail? Why is culture important to students' academic achievement?
2. What does the research say about the impact of students' cultures on academic achievement?
3. How could students' cultures be integrated into a classroom to help students succeed academically according to teachers?
4. How do teachers and students know that cultures impact their academic achievement in the classroom?

5. Are there sufficient resources for teachers to incorporate cultures to support student academic achievement? If there are, what are they?

### **Literature Review**

In order to answer the questions that this research presents and obtain knowledge of what other studies have developed about the influence of culture on the academic achievement of students from diverse backgrounds, this literature review explains how education has been used in the past as a form of control and to limit students. The meaning of culture and its influences is explained. It also covers the impact that teachers' attitudes have on students, how the formation programs impact the way teachers value students' culture, and the challenges that teachers of diverse students can affront. This literature review also covers some outcomes of not considering students' culture and how to implement culture in classrooms.

***Education Form of Control.*** In the past, Education has served as a form of control and assimilation. In Canada, the residential school system forces the Native Americans to assimilate and learn how to live in the White Society by denying their cultures and languages (Banks & Romaine, 2009). This demonstrated how the school system is used as a form of control in which race, standards, and expectations have perpetuated educational inequality (Darder, 2012). Many techniques have been used to limit students. For example, Language is used as a form to control, silent student voices and restrict their participation in school (Darder, 2012). Education continues to be rigid by systematic racism. There exists inequality in the distribution of sources and poor curriculum.

Goldenberg (2014) suggests that the lack of opportunity for equitable and cultural education for students of color is that has resulted in problematic outcomes such as slow

academic achievement. Therefore school that fails to support students will function as barriers to students' success (Arbelo, 2016; Makarova & Birman, 2015). Still, practices such as creating multicultural education aim to eliminate educational inequalities and create social justice (Aslan, 2022). Even though Martin's (2013) studies suggest that a multicultural curriculum yields more benefits to white students because the courses primarily target the lack of knowledge of these students. On the other hand, multicultural curriculums also show positively affect students' cultural identity, intergroup understanding, and contact, as also democratic understanding by creating opportunities for “meaningful and honest discussions about race and ethnic relations” (Martin, 2013, p. 120).

***Teachers' Expectations/ Program of Formation, Pedagogies, and Believes.*** Teachers have a significant impact on students, and they also face challenges in serving students and helping them succeed in the classroom. Teachers' support benefits students' academic success, and teachers' expectations and attitudes should be considered highly important when accommodating culturally diverse students (Makarova & Birman, 2015) as the formation programs of the teachers play a significant role in the outcomes and attitudes of teachers toward students. Because teachers' expectations are influenced by the pedagogies theories and education structure and practice of the training programs (Darder, 2012). Many teachers don't recognize their bias toward students, which can result in a lack of acknowledgment of the cultural differences that rigid the environment and relationship of the power at work in the classroom among students from different cultures and ethnicity (Darder,2012).

Moreover, Goldenberg (2014) suggests that recognizing nondominant cultures can create better connections with students of color and promote a more positive learning environment. Also, recognizing that white teachers are part of the dominant culture is key because teachers

need to understand that when entering a classroom full of students of diverse and unique cultural backgrounds, those students may have a different perspective on the classroom, school, and their learning than their white teachers (Goldenberg, 2014). This is because teachers' experience can be limited. Therefore, students will have different perspectives and opinions about the environment in the classroom and the component that conform to it. Not only should teachers take into consideration the success of students, but advisors also have to understand the role of family and avoid judgments and stereotypical thinking to support the needs of students (Roscoe, 2015).

There are many teachers and professors who desire to help students succeed and respect their culture, but they can face challenges when trying to help students to reach academic goals. As Boon (2016) explains, diverse cultures reflected in classrooms mean teachers face challenges because students might differ in more than just background knowledge but also in strategies they use to approach and solve problems. Teachers understand that students' cultures can be integrated into the classroom to help them succeed but can also be challenging; at the same time teachers believe that students need to learn how to succeed in this country and learn the norms and values that rigid this nation (Bonner et al., 2018). It is essential to understand that there is a certain resistance to implementing Cultural Responsible Pedagogies because of teachers' fear and anxiety about dealing with their demands and standards (Gay, 2013). Therefore, in order to help students and teachers create a better environment to promote students' academic achievement and implement culturally responsible pedagogies, training and forming educational programs may include preparation to serve diverse students (Bonner et al., 2018).

***Cultural influences (Family).*** Culture can mean many things, is a broad word that can include dress, behavior patterns, race, religion, nationality, occupation, and language that shape



the culture and identity of a person or a group ( Banks & Romaine, 2009), other uses the term “cultural capital” which the French sociologist ,Pierre Bourdieu uses to describe the beliefs, knowledge, and sense of self that is linked to a person or in order words tangible cultural identifiers such as mannerisms, dress, beliefs, and values, the taste of food or music (Goldenberg, 2014) or as Gay ( 2013) explains culture have equivalent meaning such as “values, attitudes, and beliefs," "customs and traditions," (p.52) "heritages and contributions," (p.52) or "experiences and perspectives," (p.52). This helps understand that within culture, families influence educational decisions due to obligations or financial reasons. Latinos families, for example, hold more influence on educational decisions than on students from other ethnic groups. Also, it is essential to clarify that parents' involvement in students' academics is present in a different way than the traditional ways that schools expect. (Arbelo, 2016). Moreover, Makarova (2015) implies that family obligations can be a burn to students; as Smith (1998) states, academic performance is related to family cultural aspects such as economic and cultural capital, therefore when cultural disconnection exists between teacher-students, communication is less, instruction is ineffective, and positive teacher affects is minimized. Roscoe (2015) also propose that culture and socioeconomic background also influence low academic rate; for example, if Afro-American Students feel unwelcome or experience any racial mistreatment or discrimination, they will drop out of that institution.

***Outcomes of not Acknowledging Cultural Differences.*** As stated above, teachers' relationship with students is crucial to their success, as Bonner (2018) suggests, teachers-students and students with other students' interactions will determine the success of diverse students. The weight cannot be only put on teachers, and students' institutions should also review their rules and routines to help minimize practices against minoritized groups and

create an inclusive school culture (Makarova, 2015). Afro and Latino students get to higher education with a lack of knowledge, low academic skills, lack of role models on campuses, difficulty assimilating, family pressure, and financial concerns, among others (Roscoe, 2015).

Therefore, institutions need to challenge the way they teach students of color or minoritized groups to help them succeed academically and to aspire to obtain higher education.

Cummins(2014) shows that Euro- American students were praised or encouraged 36% more than Mexican-Americans in classroom contributions. This makes students internalize the idea that they are not seen as academically capable or expected to succeed. For example, stereotypes and negative attitudes toward a variety of English spoken by low socioeconomic status African American students had its results on academic engagement (Cummins, 2014). Language is a cultural factor that can also impact academic achievement results; it can be connected to the discontinuity between home and school ( Banks & Romaine, 2009).

***Implementing Culture in Classes.*** Language is a cultural factor that impact academic achievement results (Banks & Romaine, 2009), therefore, if students' culture and language are used in school or considered, there will be more academic success (Bonner et al., 2018). Teachers can also adjust particular aspects of their pedagogy to fit student needs by using cultural knowledge as a teaching tool, which means connecting previous experiences and knowledge with new material (Boon, 2016). Gay (2013) suggests that reading materials of different authors, ethnic groups, cultures, heritage, and experiences can be used to meet standards. It is essential to understand that culture and differences are natural and should be normal to teach and learn about them, especially because race, like culture and other human differences, does not carry any inherent stamp of privilege or problem, only those that society and politic construct around them and problems arise when these values want to be imposed over

others (Gay, 2013). Therefore, understanding that quality teaching is based on an ethical disposition that respect and value cultural diversity (Boon, 2016) is crucial. Because diversity shape instruction behaviors, if they are developed in a positive and constructive way, in that form, competence will build confidence, and success will create success (Gay, 2013).

### **Methods and Procedures**

To further investigate the answer to the presented research questions in the introduction and background section, aside from consulting the articles that conform to the literature review of this document, interviews with teachers/ professors were developed, and surveys toward their students. The interview consisted of questions to investigate how teachers value students' culture and how it impacts their academic achievement. One high school teacher (See Appendix A) and three professors (See Appendixes B, C, and D) from a university in the Central Coast of California area were interviewed. These teachers/ professors were chosen by considering their exposure to different cultures due to the courses they taught. Two of these teachers/professors were females, and two were males, who also proceeded from different ethnic backgrounds. Also, the high school teacher was asked to share an anonymous survey with two of her classes( See Student Survey 1), and the professors also provided the survey to two of their classes (See Students Survey 2). After the data was collected, it was analyzed by comparing teachers'/professors' comments with the answer to students' surveys and with information obtained from the literature review.

### **Results, Findings, and Discussion**

The following section will contain the findings, results and a discussion about the data collected. Along with the comparison of students' answers in the surveys with the comments of the teachers/ professors interviewed. Each of the research questions is answered by comparing

students' responses in the surveys, teachers' comments, and information obtained from the journal articles that were consulted to create the literature review and carry out this research.

1. *What is culture? What does it entail? Why is culture important to students' academic achievement?*

Culture can mean various things, as the students in the survey describe (Question 1 in Surveys 1&2). Culture is where you come from and is what makes you who you are; the traditions, customs, languages, the food that you eat, and the music you listen, it represent who you are without feeling ashamed; it is all forms of life, including art, beliefs, and behaviors. Culture represents the form that you express yourself, something that makes you different from others. It is important to recognize that “culture represent where we came from”, but that culture updates/modified (Survey 2 respondent 3, personal Communication, March 16, 2023). Professor D recognized this as she mentions that culture is constantly changing. (See Appendix 4). This can be a result of coexistence with other cultures or adjusting to the norms of this country. Gay (2013) also explains that cultural equivalent can be “values, attitudes, and beliefs,” “customs and traditions,” “heritages and contributions,” or “experiences and perspectives” (p.52). Culture can also be considered as behavior patterns, race, religion, nationality, occupation, and language that shape the identity of a person or a group (Banks & Romaine, 2009). This is precisely the opinion of Teacher A (See Appendix 1), in which culture is considered as part of a student's identity, and they should have the opportunity to share it and be recognized (Teacher A; personal communication, March 16, 2023).

Culture is essential to students' academics because, as Professor C stated, “Culture is the means by which we understand reality in the world is deeper than food, dress... etc. Culture comes with values, internal values, and things people feel are important to them. Is how people

work” (Professor C., personal communication, March 22, 2023). Professor C's opinion about culture connects to those of students' surveys (Professor C., personal communication, March 22, 2023) (See Survey 1 & Survey 2) because students think culture defines who they are, where they come from and represents behaviors and also beliefs. “It is important to understand someone's culture not just on a superficial level but to understand the culture of them, what they know, how they know, how they grow, how they learn, and how they show it, it’s a puzzle, different for every group of people you came across, that’s why being flexible is essential” (Professor C., personal communication, April 25, 2023) (See Appendix 3). In other words, culture is also the way to understand ideas and give meaning to everyday life, culture also influences students' aspirations, homework habits, and extracurricular activities (Smith, 1998) .

Professor B also suggests that the cultural foundation of students can or cannot function as insurance to affront the challenges because how students feel impact their learning, their potential performance (Professor B., personal communication, March 22, 2023) (See Appendix 2). In the professor's words is like how good the land you plant a seed is, it will determine a good or bad result (Professor B., personal communication, March 22, 2023). Professor D declared that culture is important but especially for kids in elementary because they are in a developing period in childhood, therefore, imposing another culture is like pulling them away from their family and their identity. Professor D thinks it is crucial to recognize the family and the culture of raising children bilingual and recognize the qualities in all cultures because like everything else there is no perfection in any culture and children raised in multilingual and bicultural environments have the opportunity to choose the best of all cultures. It is essential to understand that when forced to speak English, people who just emigrated to this country as refugees or for other reasons make them feel less confident and vulnerable because their native

languages feel like home, therefore, finding ways to bring people together for cultural understanding is essential and treating everyone with respect (Professor D., personal communication, March 25, 2023) (See Appendix 4).

2. *What does the research say about the impact of students' cultures on academic achievement?*

There is much research that shows that culture influences student academic achievement, but socioeconomic is also a strong factor. Culture influences student aspirations, and academic performance is related to family cultural aspects such as parent's socioeconomic status, according to Smith (1998). The family has a strong influence on student academic achievement; as Arbelo (2016) stated, Latinos families have a strong influence on students that they may postpone aspirations in order to support their family members. Makarova & Birnman (2015) corroborated this because achievement outcomes were worsened when young people were burdened by their family obligations such as contributing to family finance.

Teachers and students interaction is significant for students' academic achievement (Makarova & Birman, 2015), but when cultural disconnection exists, teachers-students communication can be less effective, and instruction is ineffective (Smith, 1998). For example, Afro-students who feel unwelcome or discriminated against will end up dropping out of school, and this can also be due to financial reasons too (Roscoe, 2015). If schools continue to inculcate values and social skills that are congruent with the dominant culture, parents with different cultures, strategies, and routines have to negotiate different pathways to help their kids succeed academically (Smith, 1998). A welcoming environment is key to students' academic achievement. When students feel a sense of trust and care in their environment and that adults around them feel responsible for their well-being, students are more motivated to arise academic

performance, on the other hand, negative perceptions affect their academic outcome (Arbelo, 2016). The theme of belonging (Smith-Maddox, 1998; Makarova & Birnman, 2015, & Roscoe, 2015) was significant among the research articles consulted for this paper. A student manifest that his/her performance was better when feeling acknowledgeable as a person otherwise, there was no interests in learning, and performed poorly in those classes. (Survey 2 respondent 1, Personal Communication, April 3, 2023). Much research suggests that by creating a culturally sustainable pedagogy, students' culture can be valued, and students' achievement can increase even though this carries challenges to the teachers to fit the needs of all diverse students (Boon, 2016; Bonneret al., 2018, & Gay, 2013).

3. *How could students' cultures be integrated into a classroom to help students succeed academically, according to teachers?*

Among the teachers/professors, all stated that building a relationship with students is key for, helping them succeed academically. As Teacher A said, knowing students and considering their opinions is needed to support students. Equally important is to include parents or legal guardians of the student, or in case of a foreign student, it is important to guide them on how the educational system work in the U.S. (Teacher A., personal communication, March 16, 2023). Professor B expressed that students' cultures can be valued and be used by scaffolding, to build upon, affirm, reinforce, and remind students of their importance, and of their potential. Culture can be integrated through reading to affirm and also show students how people from their cultural background have overcome and faced struggles by learning history from minoritized groups, Asians, Native Americans, Afro-Americans, and Latinos (Professor B., personal communication, March 22, 2023). This is connected with what Professor D said that the beauty of cultural sustainable pedagogies is that children and students tap into culture and linguistic

(social history) from others. Students can analyze things through different lenses. Professor D points out that kids need to learn about what they know, read works about people from their culture to value their culture and heritage but then expand to explore the world. By reading about others to understand the other groups and make connections “otherwise we are going to end in a racial war” (Professor D., personal communication, March 25, 2023). Therefore, it is important to bring multicultural and multilingual literature, and draw from the collective knowledge of the class ,by using the students experiences and culture and co-construct an understanding. “It is important to celebrate cultures in the classroom but to do it in a equitable way and that can be challenging” (Professor D. personal communication, March 25, 2023). Professor C suggests that students' culture needs to be valued all the time, every day, not only on specific target months, and value student languages, racial ethnicity, value how they learn, how they reproduce information and being able to do that in multiple ways because students learn in different ways. Also, let students have a say, have them set some rules, release some power, and include students in organizing and forming what their responsibilities in the classroom will be; in other words, hold everyone accountable (Professor C., personal communication March 22, 2023). In these different ways, culture can be implemented to show students that they take part in their development as learners.

These views of teachers/professors can also be seen in the students surveys in which they expressed that culture can be integrated by learning history about their culture, about important people that left an impact, by letting others know about their culture, by sharing respect, and also giving opinions about what students know. Also, by talking about different cultures represented in their school through presentations or posters around the walls of classrooms (See Survey 1). Students from Survey 2 also believe that culture can be integrated by acknowledging the



different backgrounds in the curriculum and elaborating on activities that they can show with respect to their culture also throughout history about their culture and course materials connecting to their cultural identities, such as books, about authors that represent their cultural background (See survey 2).

4. *How do teachers and students know that cultures impact their academic achievement in the classroom?*

Professor D comments that in order to know how culture impacts students' academic achievement, teachers need to recognize that culture impacts their own learning and understand that culture is important, but it changes with time. It is important to understand that perceptions vary because of cultural influences, “for the environment we grew up in, and values that were inculcated”, stated Teacher A (Teacher A., personal communication, March 16, 2023) (See Appendix 1). Moreover, Teacher A warns that ignoring students' differences will expose them to feeling awkwardness and unrespected by not being like the others or the “majority group” (Teacher A., personal communication, March 16, 2023). Professor B expressed that is hard to know when culture impacts students' academic achievement because some parts can be measured and others not, but the level of participation and students' self-doubt can be some signs; furthermore, students that don't see themselves as valued will feel disempowered, and deculturalization can happen, “which is terrible because when you take human culture away, you destroy that human” (Professor B., personal communication, March 22, 2023). Professor C suggests that a sense of community is needed to support students and understand that everyone has ups and downs, and challenges. People need to know what they are in school; people need to assess themselves constantly, especially those students in higher education. For children, they

need more support, and all students need to feel that they matter and belong (Professor C., personal communication, March 22, 2023).

In the survey 1, 39% of the students are not sure if culture impacts their academic achievement, 24.4 answered yes, 2.4% preferred not to answer, and 34% percent believe culture doesn't affect their academic performance. It should be noted that these results are from students in Spanish classes, and these results could be different in other subject classes. These students can feel that their culture is related to the subject, therefore, this data need to be carefully analyzed. Thus, students that answered that culture impacts their academic achievement commented that culture impacts them because they speak Spanish; their parents encouraged them to attend and do their best in school, shows that they are learning about their culture and make parents proud. Another student mentioned that there are cultural clashes in the classroom with their culture; they can know something different than the rest of the classroom (Survey 1 respondent 16, Personal Communication, March 16, 2023).

In Survey 2, 44.4% of students think that culture impacts their academic achievement, while 55.6 were unsure. One student commented that feeling acknowledged makes more academic involvement; another said first-generation students feel too much pressure from everyone because there are certain beliefs that lead students through academic struggles. Another student pointed out that this country in which many ethnic groups live needs to let students know that their origins are valuable and be motivated to continue their education (Survey 2, respondent 5 & question 4 respondent 5, Personal Communication, April 3, 2023).

- 5. Are there sufficient resources for teachers to incorporate cultures to support student academic achievement? If there are, what are they?*

Professor C believes there are success to teach student in a sustainable way; there are many research studies that show the benefits of implementing culturally responsive pedagogies; therefore, he hopes there is responsive teaching in schools. But Professor C mentions that it depends upon the teacher if they want to incorporate pedagogies that benefit students because a lot of people don't like changes and have a mindset. Culture of learning and its importance can be diminished by teachers. It is important to mention that there is funding inequality among schools (Professor C., personal communication, March 22, 2023). Teacher A believes there can always be improvement, and that sources can be limited. Therefore, she believes that the best way to support students is by listening to them and trying to take into account their ideas. Teacher A expressed that many projects that were developed in the classroom came from students' ideas. But that there is a struggle to carry out nontraditional activities that take students' culture into account because in the public schools, there is a limit on money for extra things, and the purchase needs to be approved; even obtaining a bus for a field trip requires a complicated process. Therefore, when the class have done activities, students buy the things which prevent students from equal participation because many don't have the economic facility (Teacher A., personal communication, March 16, 2023).

Professor B thinks that in some places, there are sufficient sources and in others, not, but that having teachers that resemble and represent minoritized groups can be a source to help students. The very individuals that teach can be a source for students, but it is essential to understand that somebody can have your skin color but not the desired or connection to help the student. Therefore, there is a need to question what their experiences are, does he/she create solidarity. Professor B explains the importance of meeting students where they are at. In other words, how to create students support, cultural support to allow students to understand that,

culture is a beautiful thing to not be ashamed of, despite what society tells you (Professor B., personal communication, March 22, 2023). Professor D believes the problem is that many classes are being run on computers, and this prevents the cultural interactions and values that a classroom can give and obtain. Professor D explains that teachers should motivate students with things that are good for them, and always have children work toward their best, and try to set them up for success by setting routines and ways that they can be engaged in. In her words, a teacher “is a magician” that needs to use magic in different ways to support the students that conform to the classroom. (Professor D., personal communication, March 25, 2023).

### **Discussion**

The comments of the teachers/professors and the results of students’ surveys suggest that they believe culture impacts students academically but understanding how is a complicated question to answer. Because culture is composed of different factors, it is hard for teachers to understand how or to what extent culture affects students’ academic achievement. But teachers/professors interviewed understand that including student culture in the classroom is important for their academic success. They also recognize that it is upon the teachers to build and include students’ cultures to support them academically. Especially because teachers do confront challenges to meet the needs of diverse students and incorporate their culture in the classroom especially when there is an inequality of distribution of resources in the educational system and a lack of training or school support to integrate students’ culture in the classrooms. The students in the surveys expressed that learning history about their culture and important people is a way to include their culture and also by including multicultural literature. Teachers/professors interviewed also believe that this is essential to build upon the knowledge of students. It is also important to consider the meaning of culture on students and recognize how this influences their

learning; the way they learn and their perceptions and desires to reach academic achievement.

Educators understand that a sense of care and relationship with students, respect and community is needed to support diverse students and the challenges that they affront.

### **Problems & Limitations**

There were some limitations to carry this senior capstone research project, such as time constraints to interview more teachers in public schools. At times, it is not easy to interview with Teacher A (See Appendix 1). Also finding articles with relevant date was complicated. In addition, there were fewer students who participated in Survey 2. The outcomes of the surveys and interviews could be affected by the way that questions were formulated. Some were confused for students, especially for the students of Survey 1. Also, the survey respondents were from the majority of the Latino students who could directly impacted the outcome of this senior capstone research project to be slanted or lopsided toward the Latinos rather than a diverse student population. Therefore, this senior capstone research project is more focused toward the Latino students. It is important also to clarify that since culture is a broad word the research did not go into much detail on all the things that culture means and the different ways that impact students' academic achievement.

### **Recommendations**

As stated in the literature review, culture encompassed a broad meaning of factors and equivalent components. Therefore, it is hard to fully understand the impact that culture has on students. But research shows that culturally sustainable pedagogies can help foster and increase the academic achievement of students by valuing culture and their equivalents (Gay, 2013; Bonner, 2018). Also, it is important to understand that attending to fit the needs of students is challenging for teachers and that schools and administration also have a responsibility to help

students succeed academically. It is indispensable that skin color and ethnicity do not determine the attitudes of teachers and school policies toward students because this can send a negative message to students of color and will prevent them to reach academic achievement

During my academic years, many teachers have helped me overcome my fears, self-doubt, and lack of confidence due to language barriers (English proficiency). I would say that I had their support, and the relationship that they developed with me has been key to helping me reach where I am right now academically. Independently from their ethnicity and physical traits, they have tried their best to acknowledge my culture and make me feel comfortable for who I am and where I have come from. At the same is important to mention that having teachers that share my cultural background has been a source of strength and motivation to continue my educational career and gain more confidence in my potential as a student. In other words it is essential to understand that differences are normal but that the social and political meaning that society gives them is problematic (Gay, 2013).

Therefore diverse students' culture needs to be valued as a factor that influences their academic achievement and teachers need support from their institutions to serve the needs of the students. Educators and school administrators need to build a community that makes students feel part of it, that they can learn in an environment where they don't feel alienated from their homes, their languages, identities, and families. Using culturally sustainable pedagogies can be a way to help the diverse students but schools need to bring the sources and support for teachers to meet the needs of students. I will argue that historically cultural sustainable pedagogies are needed to expose students to learning from their culture and value their identity and the culture of other minoritized groups in this nation, to help them reach academic achievement.

### **Conclusion**

Culture is a strong source to motivate students to succeed academically, but is a word that encompasses many meanings, therefore, fully understanding the impact on students is complicated and more research needs to be done. Also, culture changes and modifications needs to be done over time. Culture impact the way we see and understand things. It influences the way we act and think. Understanding that imposing one culture over another is like pulling students away from their family and their identity is important for students' academic outcomes. Finding a way to bring everyone together for cultural understanding is essential. Also, keeping in mind that culture influences aspirations and academic performance is essential to help students. A welcoming environment, and creating relationships of care and trust between teachers and students are crucial for students academic success. Culture can be used to scaffold and build upon new knowledge, to affirm and reinforce student potential. To have an insight into how culture impacts students, teachers, and school administrators need to recognize the influence of culture on them, also that perceptions vary due to culture, that including multicultural and historical literature can help expand the understanding of the cultures that may conform to a classroom.

Therefore, student's culture should be included in classrooms in an equitable way that allows students to learn from one another, but that doesn't segregate the students. It is important to understand that students learn in different ways and that holding everyone accountable will predict the result in the classroom environment. Teachers and school administrators have a responsibility to make students learn in an environment where they can feel comfortable enough to learn and succeed academically as well as families to be part of the student's education. For that reason, understanding students' culture and what culture entails is key to helping students and families. The most important is to understand that schools that fail to recognize the diversity

of their students the challenges that this carry and the needs that teachers face will contribute to the educational gaps between students of diverse background and their counterparts. Therefore teachers, school administrators, and the school district need to implement pedagogies that encourage, affirm, respect, and value student cultures to help them reach academic achievement.



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Appendix

**Appendix 1 - Teacher A**

Teacher Questionnaire

1. Why Do you think is it important to value students' culture and create a cultural sustainable pedagogy? ¿Por qué cree que es importante valorar la cultura de los estudiantes y crear una pedagogía cultural sostenible?

Yo pienso que la cultura de los estudiantes es parte de su identidad y es importante reconocerla y darles la oportunidad de compartirla. He aprendido mucho sobre mis estudiantes conociendo su cultura. Hay 20 países hispanohablantes y a pesar de que todos hablamos el mismo idioma, cada uno tiene regionalismos que son diferentes y que los distinguen de los demás.

2. How could students' cultures be integrated into a classroom to help students succeed academically? ¿Cómo podrían integrarse las culturas de los estudiantes en un salón de clases para ayudar a los estudiantes a tener éxito académico?

En mi currículum, incluyo diferentes actividades en las cuales los estudiantes pueden expresar su cultura y además aprendemos sobre la de otros países. Hacemos comparaciones, siempre tratando de resaltar la riqueza e importancia de cada una. En el colegio que trabajo actualmente ofrecemos los cursos de Español de Herencia 3 y 4 que en sí es un reconocimiento de la cultura de los estudiantes, ya que se reconoce que tienen necesidades diferentes a los estudiantes de Español 1, 2 o 3 que son cursos para no nativos o con poco conocimiento previo.

3. How do you think teachers and students know that culture impacts their academic achievement in the classroom? ¿Cómo cree que los maestros y los estudiantes saben que la cultura afecta su rendimiento académico en el salón de clases?

La forma en que las personas percibimos las cosas varía y es importante reconocer que nuestra percepción está influenciada por nuestra cultura, por la forma y el ambiente en el que crecimos y los valores que nos inculcaron. Si ignoramos las diferencias de los estudiantes los exponemos a que se sientan incómodos o irrespetados por no ser como los demás o como la mayoría. Cuando un estudiante no siente que pertenece al grupo, esto puede incrementar la apatía hacia la materia y al perder el interés por la misma puede llevar al mal rendimiento académico.

4. Do you think there are sufficient resources for teachers to incorporate students' culture to support their academic achievement? ¿Cree que hay suficientes recursos para que los maestros incorporen la cultura de los estudiantes para apoyar su rendimiento académico?

Creo que siempre se puede hacer un mejor trabajo y a veces los recursos son limitados. En mi opinión, el mayor apoyo que podemos darles a los estudiantes es escuchándolos y tratando de tomar sus ideas en cuenta. Muchos de los proyectos que he hecho han salido de los estudiantes. Les he consultado ideas y si la mayoría las aprueba, las hacemos.

5. If there are sources, what are some of them? Si hay los recursos, ¿cuáles son algunos de ellos?

Por ejemplo, conseguir un bus para un viaje no siempre es fácil, hay que hacer mucho papeleo y esperar aprobación. También, no tenemos mucho dinero disponible por año para hacer compras de materiales extras para hacer ciertas actividades no tradicionales pero que sí toman en cuenta la cultura de los estudiantes, por ejemplo hacer piñatas, manualidades para el día de los muertos, comidas tradicionales de países hispanos, etc. Lo he hecho pero los estudiantes han tenido que comprar las cosas y debido a esto no todos pueden participar por igual, ya que muchos no tienen la facilidad económica.

6. In your perspective, what is needed to support student academic success? En su perspectiva, ¿qué se necesita para apoyar el éxito académico de los estudiantes?

Desde mi perspectiva, debemos conocer a nuestros estudiantes y tomar en cuenta sus opiniones. Por otra parte, necesitamos más recursos, más fondos para comprar materiales. Cuando trabajé en un colegio privado esto era súper fácil, simplemente compraba y me reembolsaban o yo entregaba una lista de compras y la oficina lo hacía. En el colegio público es diferente, solo tengo una pequeña cantidad de dinero para cosas extras y la compra debe ser aprobada. A veces demoran en llegar las cosas también.

Otro aspecto muy importante, es incluir a los padres de familia o acudientes legales de los estudiantes. En el caso de estudiantes extranjeros, es importante orientarlos sobre cómo funciona el sistema educativo aquí en Estados Unidos, porque no es igual al de sus países de origen.

## Appendix 2

### Interview Questions for Professor B

1. Why do you think is it important to value students' culture and create a cultural sustainable pedagogy? ¿Por qué cree que es importante valorar la cultura de los estudiantes y crear una pedagogía cultural sostenible?
2. How could students' cultures be integrated into a classroom to help students succeed academically? ¿Cómo podrían integrarse las culturas de los estudiantes en un salón de clases para ayudar a los estudiantes a tener éxito académico?
3. How do you think teachers and students know that culture impacts their academic achievement in the classroom? ¿Cómo cree que los maestros y los estudiantes saben que la cultura afecta su rendimiento académico en el salón de clases?
4. Do you think there are sufficient resources for teachers to incorporate students' culture to support their academic achievement? ¿Cree que hay suficientes recursos para que los maestros incorporen la cultura de los estudiantes para apoyar su rendimiento académico?
5. If there are sources, what are some of them? Si hay los recursos, ¿cuáles son algunos de ellos?
6. In your perspective, what is needed to support student academic success? En su perspectiva, ¿qué se necesita para apoyar el éxito académico de los estudiantes?

### Appendix 3

#### Interview Questions for Professor C

1. Why do you think is it important to value students' culture and create a cultural sustainable pedagogy? ¿Por qué cree que es importante valorar la cultura de los estudiantes y crear una pedagogía cultural sostenible?
2. How could students' cultures be integrated into a classroom to help students succeed academically? ¿Cómo podrían integrarse las culturas de los estudiantes en un salón de clases para ayudar a los estudiantes a tener éxito académico?
3. How do you think teachers and students know that culture impacts their academic achievement in the classroom? ¿Cómo cree que los maestros y los estudiantes saben que la cultura afecta su rendimiento académico en el salón de clases?
4. Do you think there are sufficient resources for teachers to incorporate students' culture to support their academic achievement? ¿Cree que hay suficientes recursos para que los maestros incorporen la cultura de los estudiantes para apoyar su rendimiento académico?
5. If there are sources, what are some of them? Si hay los recursos, ¿cuáles son algunos de ellos?
6. In your perspective, what is needed to support student academic success? En su perspectiva, ¿qué se necesita para apoyar el éxito académico de los estudiantes?

## Appendix 4

### Interview Questions for Professor D

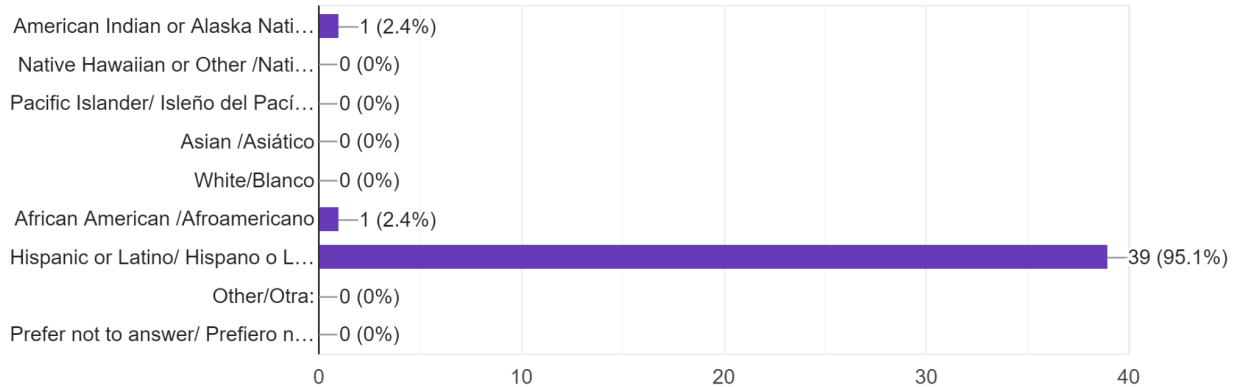
1. Do you value students' culture? Why? Valora usted la cultura de los estudiante? Por que?
2. What is culturally sustainable pedagogy and what are your views on cultural sustainable pedagogy? ¿Qué es la pedagogía culturalmente sostenible y cuáles son sus puntos de vista sobre la pedagogía culturalmente sostenible?
3. How could students' cultures be integrated into a classroom to help students succeed academically? ¿Cómo podrían integrarse las culturas de los estudiantes en un salón de clases para ayudar a los estudiantes a tener éxito académico?
4. How do you think teachers and students know that culture impacts their academic achievement in the classroom? ¿Cómo cree que los maestros y los estudiantes saben que la cultura afecta su rendimiento académico en el salón de clases?
5. How do you think there are sufficient resources for teachers to incorporate students' culture to support their academic achievement? ¿Cree que hay suficientes recursos para que los maestros incorporen la cultura de los estudiantes para apoyar su rendimiento académico?
6. If there are sources, what are some of them? Si hay los recursos, ¿cuáles son algunos de ellos?
7. In your perspective, what is needed to support student academic success? En su perspectiva, ¿qué se necesita para apoyar el éxito académico de los estudiantes?

## Student Survey 1 High School Students

1.

What is your ethnicity? ¿Cuál es su etnia?

41 responses



2. What does culture mean for you? ¿Qué significa la cultura para usted?

1. La cultura para mi es de donde eres y tus ancestros
2. todas las formas de vida, incluidas las artes, las creencias y las instituciones de una población que se transmiten de generación en generación
3. Culture means to me a part of my life that shows who I am.
4. people celebrate holidays different
5. it is very special for me and love our traditions
6. It means something that i should care a lot about. How it has to do with where i'm from and the need to know my history behind my culture.
7. it means your lifestyle because of what/where you're from
8. Que tipo de persona soy
9. culture means a lot to me.
10. Son las tradiciones, fiestas, celebraciones, comidas y valores de cada país.
11. things that my ancestors did and have been pasted on
12. es un conjunto de creencias y celebraciones de cada parte del mundo
13. culture means representing where you are from without being embarrassed
14. cultura es de donde vienen los ancestros
15. its not that important but it still maters
16. who and what i am or idk

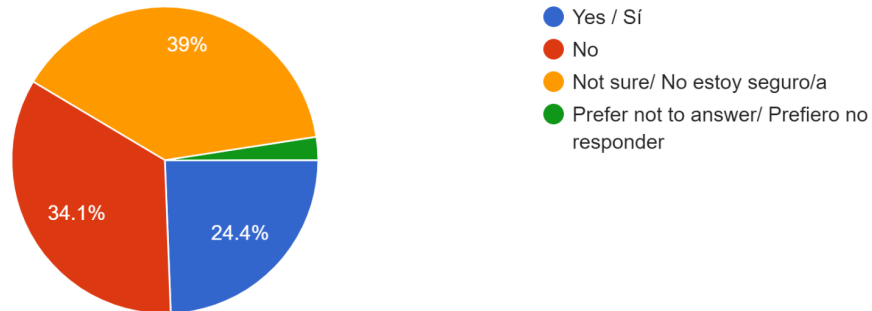


17. Respeto a los ancianos. Fiestas, comida, y familia.
18. Who I am
19. para mi la cultura es informacion que interesante que nos ayuda a aprender y nos hace como persona
20. Idk
21. To have traditions and customs.
22. las tradiciones que tiene algún lugar
23. something from a country that they celebrate
24. it means what where we coem from is n what we do and eat from wheere we come from
25. significan creencias, valores y comportamientos que se comparten en un grupo de personas
26. pues existen muchas culturas diferentes en cada país, son creencias y valores diferentes que tiene cada cultura y comportamientos diferentes también
27. IDK
28. Las comidas, tradiciones, y lenguajes significa cultura para mi.
29. Es algo muy importante porque la cultura se basa a lo que somos como personas y todo lo que sabemos y creemos.
30. algo que me hace sentir diferente
31. Es importante porque es lo que somos como personas
32. Las tradiciones,comida,y personas.Es muy importante en la vida de alguien
33. se significa de donde soy y mi cultura
34. Las tradiciones de cada persona , mi forma de expresarse y mi idioma.
35. es expresa tu origen de donde vienes y las tradisiones
36. La cultura significa para mi es que la comidas los bailes típicos son hermosos.
37. algo que me hace sentir diferente
38. conjunto de conocimiento e ideas no especializados
39. It means the history of a place and traditions.

3.

Do you think your culture impacts your academic achievement in the classroom? ¿Cree que su cultura tiene un impacto en su rendimiento académico en el salón de clases?

41 responses



4. If you answer yes to the previous question, please share how you think culture impacts your academic achievement. Si respondió afirmativamente a la pregunta anterior, por favor comparta de qué manera cree que la cultura afecta su rendimiento académico.

1. No
2. i put not sure
3. my parents are hispanics and all they do is encourage me to attend and do my best in school
4. It shows that I learned more about my culture than I already do and makes my parents proud to that I can speak and understand it more to know how to conjugate words ect.
5. ....
6. ....
7. no se
8. Si porque hablo español a todos mis familiares a respeto de ellos y mi cultura.
9. Culture impacts me because that's who I am
10. por ejemplos si nos preguntan algo como un dato podemos responder algo que sepamos gracias a lo que aprendimos
11. No
12. En tijuana no hay mucha cultura como en otros paises o estados
13. no me afecta en nada
14. no me afecta en nada en mi rendimiento académico

15. n/a
16. Porque existen choques culturales, pueda que a base de nuestra cultura sepamos algo de una manera y en el salón de clase sea de otra manera.
17. no me afecta
18. Porque existen choques culturales
19. It does affect me in spanish class because I speak spanish so it gives me an advantage in this class
20. Porque a veces no entienden algunas palabra que uno dice , por qué algunos lenguajes son diferente.
21. el cambio de idioma y cambio de tradiciones
22. no me afecta
23. por que no estoy seguro si me afecta en mi rendimiento

5. How can your culture be integrated into the classroom? ¿Cómo se puede integrar su cultura en el aula?

1. MI cultura se puede integrar a la clase porque yo soy de un país que habla espanol.
2. Exprese interés en el origen étnico de sus alumnos.
3. It can be integrated into the classroom by learning its history or about important people that left an impacted
4. share with respect
5. I am not sure.
6. Learning about different people that have left a massive impact .
7. i want to learn more about my culture and its history
8. learn more about my culture
9. learning more about the impact and history of my culture.
10. ....
11. dando a conocer a todos los compañeros sobre mi cultura
12. i dont think you can fit it in a classroom
13. no se
14. i dont know really
15. Idk
16. Puede ayudar por conocer palabras similares que uso en la casa con mi familia.
17. My culture's history is being taught

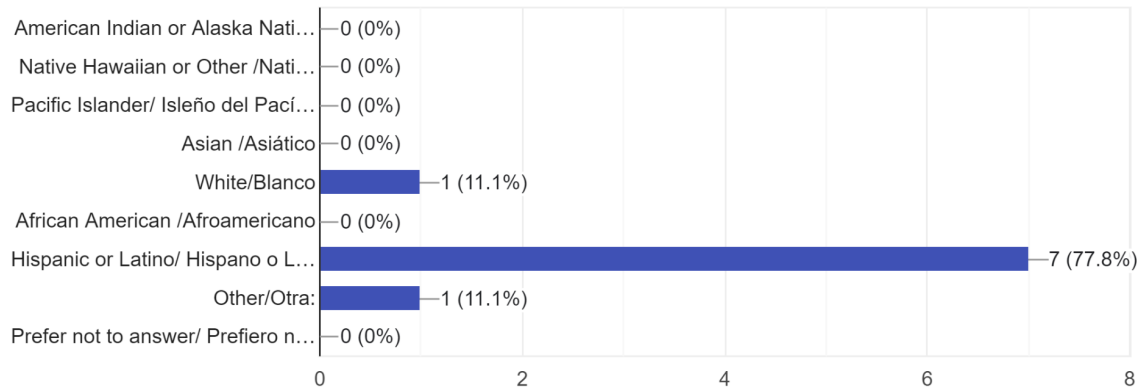
18. haciendo trabajos en equipo
19. To be honest this is hard to think about since we already have my culture in this classroom
20. I do not know
21. mi cultura sigue siendo parte de la cultura mexicana entonces la cultura mexicana es muy importante
22. maybe like in learning about it
23. by doing n learning abt customs from diffrent culters
24. aprendiendo las cultura de los demas
25. tal vez sabiendo algunas cosas sobre la cultura que hay en mi país y aprender de ello
26. IDK
27. learning more about how mexicans speak spanish not just academic spanish.
28. Tratando de opinar sobre temas respectos a la clase sobre lo que nosotros sabemos
29. asiendo trabajador del tipo de la cultura
30. Dando nuestras opiniones sobre lo que sabemos
31. I dont know
32. by talking it
33. Pues conociendose mas.
34. la forma de expresar
35. Pues comunicado me con personas .pues no me afecta
36. haciendo trabajos sobre la cultura
37. no se muy bien
38. By talking about different cultures represented in our school by a presentation or do posters and put it around the classroom/school walls.

## Student Survey 2

### University Students

#### 1. What is your ethnicity? ¿Cuál es su etnia?

9 responses



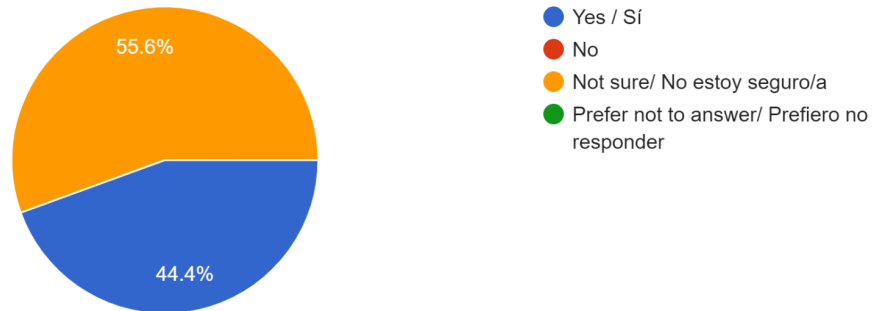
#### 2. What does culture mean for you? ¿Qué significa la cultura para usted?

1. For me, culture means my customs or the customs of the people of the country where I am from.
2. Customs, ancestors, people, folklore, stories, and family
3. culture is pretty important, especially here in the USA since everyone comes from different backgrounds. I also think its important to remember and keep in mind where we come from. another thing is that we get to create new updates/modifications from our culture since we are in a different country.
4. The traditions I grew up with that were introduced to me by my family/close family friends.
5. I wouldn't be who I am without my culture. It is an aspect of my being that makes me who I am.
6. It is about things that make us unique in a way and united us like music, religion, food
7. To me, culture means passing on traditions/beliefs to new generations within their families or ethnic groups.
8. Culture means celebrating and embracing who you are
9. La cultura significa que un grupo de personas practican y valoran los mismos o similares ideales acerca de lugar de origen tales como su idioma, religion, comida, vestimenta y roles que desempeñan ambos sexos en la familia.

3.

Do you think your culture impacts your academic achievement in the classroom? ¿Cree que su cultura tiene un impacto en su rendimiento académico en el salón de clases?

9 responses



4.If you answer yes to the previous question, please share how you think culture impacts your academic achievement.

Si respondió afirmativamente a la pregunta anterior, por favor comparta de qué manera cree que la cultura afecta su rendimiento académico.

1. My culture impacts my academic achievement because I'm more likely to want to be involved academically when I feel acknowledged. In the past, whenever I have not felt acknowledged as a person, it has made me not interested in learning, and I performed poorly in those classes.
2. \*There have been numerous times when I was young where I would get to share my culture with my peers. This created a sense of security and confidence for me within the classroom that has followed me through my academic career. Connecting folktales, literacy patterns, mythology, history and more to my own culture has sparked curiosity that has driven me to continue learning. This is why any teacher strives to achieve, life long learning.
3. It is very common for first-generation students to feel a lot of pressure from everyone (society, friends, and family) to get through college. There are some cultures that have certain beliefs or sayings that lead students to go through academic struggles.
4. n/a

5. Debido a que en este país aloja a muchos grupos étnicos, es necesario dejarle saber a los estudiantes que sus orígenes son tal valiosos como los de este país. Esta imagen inclusiva y valorada alienta a los estudiantes ver líderes de sus países en sus clases y se miran representados con aliento a seguir una educación superior.

5. How can your culture be integrated into the classroom? ¿Cómo se puede integrar su cultura en el aula?

1. Culture can be integrated by acknowledging the different backgrounds in the curriculum and elaborating on current and past events of different ethnicities. One way this can be done is by discussing their experiences and having students elaborate. Educators or teachers can learn from students whenever they are unaware of specific cultures or for them to feel acknowledged as individuals.
2. With history about my culture
3. i feel that we have to learn and respect everyone's point of view when it comes to classroom setting.
4. I think that my culture is represented, but an effort should definitely be made to make sure that the cultures of all students are represented so that they feel that they are seen and respected, and so that all the students learn more about the different cultures that make up their community(school and outside of school).
5. There are so many ways that culture can be integrated within a classroom, many of which are very simple and easy to fit into a curriculum. For example, when I was in preschool we were asked to work at home with our parents in a poster with pictures and facts about our culture. We also were able to bring in goods to share. This made little me feel so proud of my culture and it created a confidence within a classroom that I've held with me. I don't think that teachers are aware of how important it is to make children feel just as comfortable in a classroom as they do in their own homes. Their home is made of up their own culture, so that should be present somehow in the classroom. Posters, flags, books, images, maps all of these are simple ways that culture can be present in the classroom.
6. I think making sure that you celebrate cultures and try to help teach other about different cultures and celebrations that other children might celebrate.

7. Course material connecting to their cultural identities. For example, textbooks and/or children's books from authors from their culture.
  8. by letting us express ourselves
  9. Mi cultura puede ser integrada por medio de la literatura, presentaciones individuales, y también por medio de entrevistas.
-