

Investing in Our Future: Inspiring Hispanics to Teach

Dr. Lisa Anne Rizopoulos

Dr. Peter McCarthy

Manhattan College
Manhattan College Parkway
Riverdale, NY 10471
USA.

Abstract

There is a horrific under-representation of Hispanics in the teaching profession. In neighborhoods predominated by Latino populations, teachers of the same cultural background are social and academic supports, and offer intimate insights that other teachers may not. More Latino role models are needed in the classroom to inspire students to pursue a career in education. Pre-service, Hispanic elementary school teachers completed a survey and engaged in informal interviews about their experiences pursuing a vocation in teaching. These timely responses are critical for all members of the Latino community for the future, so opportunities for recruiting and training Hispanics teachers can be explored.

Keywords: Hispanics, teaching, English as a Second Language

Introduction

Hispanic students need Latino teachers to mirror their culture, experiences, and values. They need to see faces that are similar to the people they trust and call “family” and learn from mentors who have familiar backgrounds, so they can retain who they are while learning about and acclimating to the American culture. There is particular concern for the lack of adequate cultural representation, especially in urban areas where minority children are living. Children need to make connections, develop community and establish a solid sense of belonging in order to feel accepted in and welcome. In neighborhoods predominated by one ethnicity, teachers of the same background may help provide a sense of cultural support and ease the transition for many students, which teachers of a different race may not offer. As the demographics of our classes continue to change to children with darker complexions and many diverse languages and beliefs, teachers realize that students come to school with different experiences, values, priorities, and economic conditions. If teachers are going to successfully reach out to Hispanic students, they must possess a compassionate understanding of where their children come from and appreciate and capitalize on children’s cultural strengths, experiences, and interests. Hispanic teachers must share their intimate experiences that reflect this diversity and strengthen educational programs to meet their students’ needs, so children can see themselves as learners and contributors in the classroom.

Rationale

Despite the increasing number of English as a Second Language Learners, there are few colleges that offer formal, extensive courses, at the undergraduate level, specifically dedicated to preparing pre-service teachers to work with children who do not speak English as their first language. A recent survey (Persad, Lewis, and Farris, 2001) reveals that only 32% of teachers feel that they have the knowledge and skills to educate diverse populations of students. Crucial topics about the best way to learn about different cultures and develop an understanding and appreciation for diversity are drizzled into a variety of education courses and are superficially “covered.” These courses attempt to establish positive attitudes and beliefs about diversity, but provide a superficial experience. Pre-service teachers do, however, receive instruction on how to create culturally responsive classrooms and strategies for differentiating instruction for diverse populations. However, there doesn’t seem to be a substitute for the direct-experience of having a teacher that represents the specific culture in order to help Latinos learn a new language and acclimate to a new culture.

In July of 2008, the US Census Bureau estimated the Hispanic population at 49.6 million. This number is expected to grow to 132.8 million by July 2050 which would make Hispanics 30% of the US population. In many school systems, Hispanic students can represent up to 20% of the student population, and in some states that number is as high as 40%. Yet in many areas, Hispanic teachers make up less than 5% of the teaching population.

These numbers represent the horrific under-representation of Hispanic teachers in the teaching profession. In September, the Department of Education extended “The Call to the Classroom” to young women and men throughout the United States. This call to the classroom was designed to reinvent interest to and within the world of teaching. As our students prepare to face a changing urban landscape, schools of education must seek answers as to why Hispanics enter the field of teaching, so we can encourage participation and enthusiasm from the Hispanic community to enter this field and improve learning. It seems only logical to ask Hispanic students who are entering the field of teaching about their role models and experiences that encouraged them to become teachers. Educators grapple with the fact that the shifting demographics in elementary classrooms have changed over the years with children from a variety of Hispanic backgrounds and the huge disparity between our students’ primarily white female faces and the students they are preparing to teach. The reoccurring, persistent question of how to recruit and retain more Hispanic pre-service teachers should be a priority for every college and university. Therefore, we must reflect on the factors that led pre-service Hispanics to the teaching field and ways to attract more Latinos to the field of teaching.

Background Information

This year there was a positive shift in my teachers’ cultural backgrounds. For the first time in thirteen years teaching at the College level, there was a 15% increase in Hispanic pre-service enrollment in my predominantly white, female education classes. These Hispanic pre-service teachers were preparing to teach in urban areas and were from a variety of Spanish speaking countries. Both females and males were represented. These students held the answer to many of the questions teachers, parents, administrators, and professors have been trying to answer: What experiences and influences helped you decide to become a teacher? If this question can be answered, perhaps more Hispanics will be motivated to go into the teaching field and address the diverse needs of Hispanic learners.

Method/Population

To capture these experiences, ten Hispanic students were given a short, informal on-line survey to complete. This survey (Appendix I) consisted of three multiple choice questions and seven open ended questions. For the purposes of this article, question eight and nine were omitted, because responses did not directly address the topic. In-person follow up interviews were conducted, so each student was given an opportunity to elaborate on their responses. These elementary pre-service teachers intend on teaching in urban areas in New York City. Seven of the students are female and three are male. These students are from various Spanish-speaking countries that include three students from Puerto Rico, two students from the Dominican Republic, two students from Cuba, one from Ecuador, and one from Columbia. One student responded “other” when asked about their Hispanic heritage. The focus of the interview was to gather information about the motivation for Hispanic pre-service teachers to enter the field of teaching. The information gleaned may shed light on opportunities for families, teachers, schools, and Hispanics considering the teaching profession as their vocation. It can also provide insight into ways colleges and high schools can support a diverse workforce that is culturally competent and more reflective of the diversity among students.

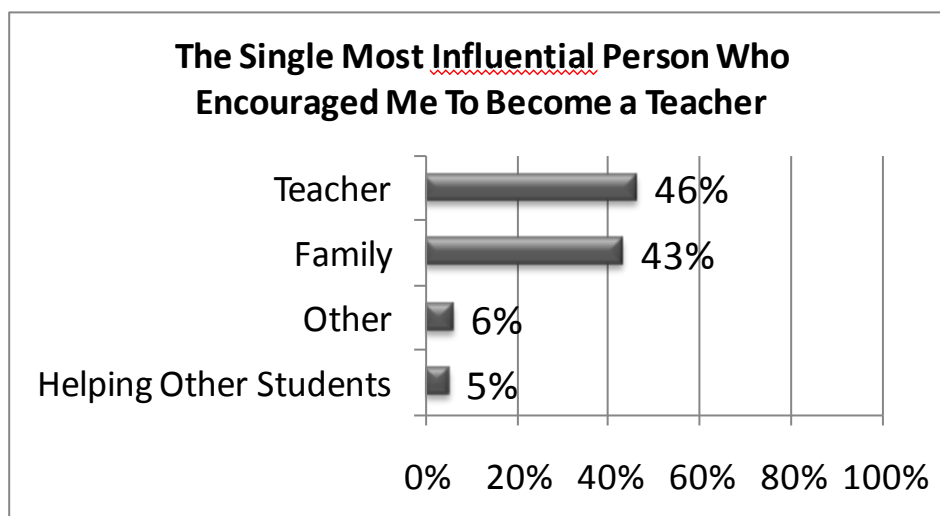
The Survey: Multiple Choice Responses

Question 1: The single most influential person who encouraged me to become a teacher was:

Survey Responses:

Forty-six percent of the respondents said that a teacher they had encouraged them to become a teacher. Forty-three percent said that a family member was an important influence when deciding to become a teacher. Five percent responded that by helping other students they wanted to become a teacher, and six percent said other.

Chart I – Question 1



Interview: Estephany, Dominican Republic , first generation Hispanic. Living in the U.S. for 14 years.

“My experience teaching others and my former teachers encouraged me to become a teacher. In the Dominican Republic, the schools run on different schedules than they do here. For example, beginning at 9:00 a.m. in the morning, the students who are in grades K-2 go to school. At 12:00 p.m., they return home to eat lunch. Then, the next grades go to school, 3:00 p.m.-5:00 p.m. The older students attend school from 2:00 p.m.-6:00 p.m. After the fifth grade, the older students go to school at night. Each class was divided into three different levels. The teacher always asked me to help out one of the younger students in the class learn what they were teaching. Since all of the students were different ages and at different levels, the older students taught the younger ones. The teacher usually asked me to help students with math. I came here, to the United States, at nine years old. When I came here, I knew very little English. My mother put me in private, Catholic school, because she wanted me to be near the church. English was very hard for me to learn, but I was always very good at math. There wasn’t a language barrier in math, so I was able to excel. Math came easy to me, because we used the same numbers in my American class that I used at home (the Dominican Republic). I made friends with other children in the class by offering to help them with math, and they helped me learn English.

That’s why I am a math major today. English is still hard for me, but numbers are numbers. Since I was so good at math and enjoyed explaining how to complete a math problem, my mother encouraged me to become a teacher. Since my mother was a single parent, she always had to work, and I was alone at home often, even during the night. She worked many hours cleaning offices, because she wanted a better life for me. She wanted me to be independent but be able to take care of a family. She always said that family was the number one priority. She thought that this would be a good profession for me, because I was good at it and loved helping children learn. After all the sacrifices she made for me, the least I can do is pursue and excel at my dream to become a teacher and help other children who don’t speak English. They deserve the same advantage to succeed that I do.”

Interview: Tyesha, Puerto Rican, First generation Hispanic Resides in the U.S., New York, for nine years

“My mother’s confidence in my abilities and my high school English teacher influenced me to become a teacher. At parent teacher conferences, the teacher called me lazy, because I wasn’t able to complete the assignment and communicate my thoughts. After the meeting, my mother told me, in Spanish, that we were going to prove them all wrong. The way she helped me was by trying to learn English herself. She taped her voice reading in Spanish and in English, and she had me listen to the tapes over and over again, so I could learn the vocabulary.

I couldn’t get into the local Catholic High School, so I went to a public high school. There I met one of the most influential teachers of my life. He was a white English teacher who read poetry written by Hispanic authors. He understood how important it was for me to see myself in the books that I read. He introduced many authors that talked about my culture and the people who were a part of me. I felt like these were people I knew, people who were a part of my family.

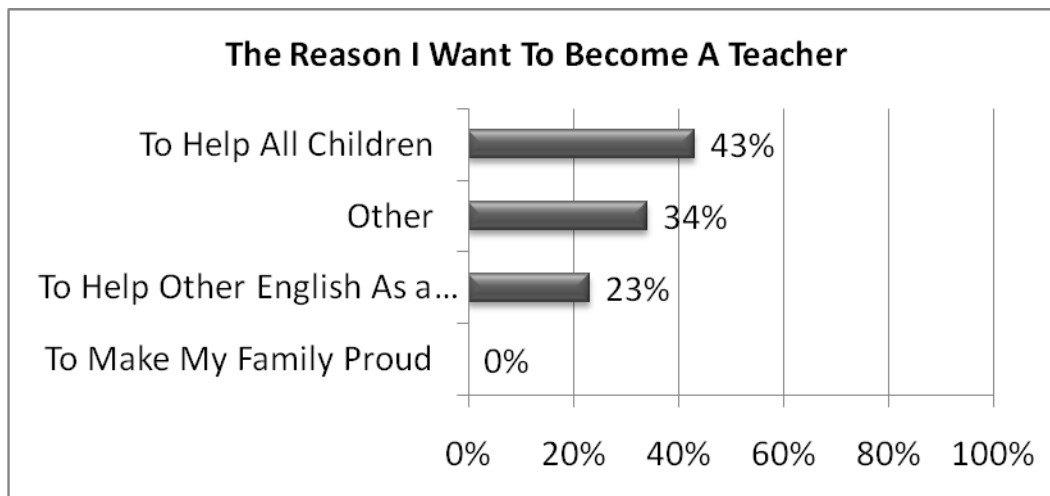
I read every book and poem that I could get my hands on by these famous authors. I read *House on Mango Street* by Sandra Cisneros six times! I talked about my culture to my classmates and contributed to discussions that focused on what I believed in. I, for a change, was the authority, and I promised to return the favor to every student who was a Latino. My mother's motto, "Let's prove them wrong," guided my family's success. All of my siblings have successful jobs, and they still call my mother when they get their grades. Even at 21, I still share my grades with her. If I earned a B, she asks, "Why couldn't it be a B+?" She always believed in trying your best and proving people wrong, if they didn't have confidence in us."

Question 2: The reason I want to become a teacher is:

Survey Responses

Forty-three percent of the respondents said that they wanted to help all children. Another thirty-four percent cited "Other" as their response. Those who chose "other" elaborated by making the following statements: "I want to inspire Hispanics and give them that motivation that maybe no one else gives them. I want them to know that someone believes in them and has high expectations for them." Yet another student wrote, "To be a positive role model to all students and to help them gain self esteem. They need to believe and feel like they are an important part of our classroom community, not an outsider trying to fit in." Twenty three wanted to become teachers in order to help other English as a Second Language learners, specifically Hispanics, progress in school. They remembered how difficult it was to learn English. They believed they would be more in-tune and sensitive to the needs of second language learners. There weren't any respondents that went into teaching solely to make their family proud of them.

Chart II – Question II



Interview: Andrew – Ecuador, first generation, Hispanic . Living in the U.S. for 10 years.

"When I came here from Ecuador, I didn't just have language problems. I was also diagnosed with Attention Deficit Disorder, but this was only discovered many years later when I attended public school in the United States. When my mother, my sister, and my two older brothers came here from Ecuador, we were placed in a Catholic school that was three blocks from my house. My brothers were older, and they seemed to catch on to the English language a lot faster than I did. At the time, the teachers didn't speak Spanish and they seemed visibly annoyed that I couldn't read, write or understand directions like the rest of the students in the class. The reason I want to be a teacher is to spare other children the embarrassment that I endured. In front of my classmates, the teacher made negative comments when I was unable to quickly respond to questions. She accused me of not paying attention, but the reason was because she didn't give me enough time to think about my responses or translate the answer in my head. I will give my second language students additional wait time, so they can think in Spanish, but give their answer in English. I will understand the different stages children go through as they learn a new language.

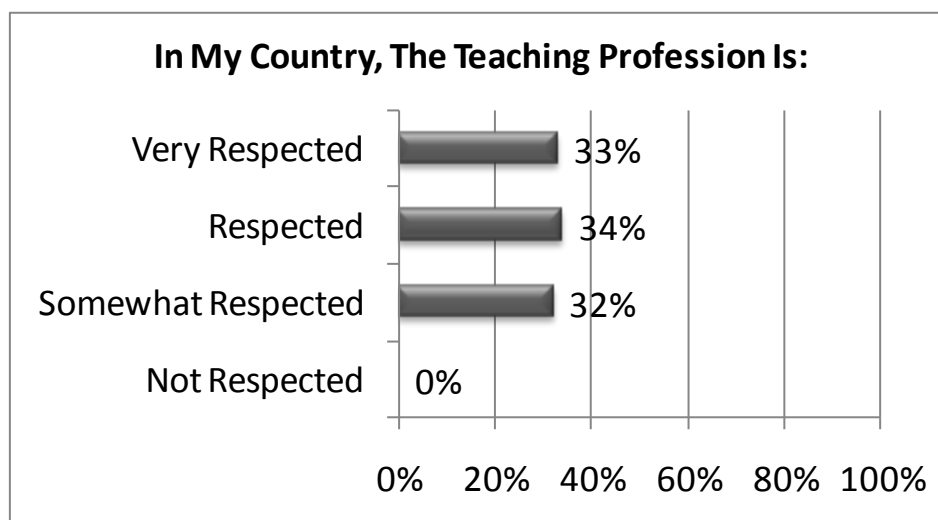
I will give each English language learner a buddy, and instead of putting students “on the spot,” I’ll allow them to think about a response, share it with their buddy, and then, if they choose, they can share it with the class.”

Question 3 – The teaching profession is

Survey Responses:

Question three was a multiple choice question and respondents had to answer if the teaching profession was respected or not respected in their country. Thirty-three percent of the respondents said that the teaching profession was “very respected,” thirty-four percent said that it was “respected” in their country, and thirty-three percent believed that the teaching profession was “somewhat respected.” Zero respondents stated that it wasn’t respected at all in their country.

Chart III – Question III



Interview: Christina, Puerto Rican. Second generation, born in New York City.

“As far as my mother was concerned, teaching was only a dream for her. She always wanted to be a teacher, but my father didn’t want her to work or go to school. He wanted us to become doctors or lawyers, because he thought that these were the professions that made the most money. He thought that the woman should stay home and mind the kids. He didn’t value an education, because he had a good job as a cook without going to school to learn his trade. He thought that if he was going to spend his money on sending us to school, we should want to be something better than being a teacher. He would say, “Teachers don’t make enough money. All those years studying and you’ll never be able to make the money back. It’s a lot of time wasted for school when you could be working now and making money. If you’re going to spend all that time studying, be a doctor.” Since my father didn’t allow my mother to work, she became my first teacher. She always said, “Being a teacher is the best job. You can love your own children at the same time you love everyone else’s children.” I know that Latino children need Latino teachers in order to become doctors and lawyers. They deserve a compassionate, sympathetic teacher who represents their culture and who is successful, so they can value and understand the difference a teacher can make. Having a teacher/mentor children can identify with will motivate them to accomplish what I have or, I hope, even more than I have.”

Open Ended Questions

Question 4 – Once you become a full-time teacher, what are two priorities you would like to focus on to help your Hispanic students succeed both academically and socially?

Survey Responses:

Student 1: I would foster a “Never give up” attitude and stress the fact that education is the way to success. I would like to also relate to them, and show them that I saw what they are seeing, I am experiencing the same things they are, and I still made it.

Student 2: I would like to be a positive role model for them, and show them that I, as a first-generation Hispanic woman, made my dreams come true. I want to show them that no matter where you come from or how bad your home life is, if you want something you can get it as long as you focus on the positives and long-term results.

Student 3: I would do my best to help the students nurture their roots and their history, while at the same time, help build their communication skills and acclimate to the American culture. They should retain their culture while embracing the new culture they are living in.

Student 4: It's not just about academics, it's about self esteem and looking at yourself differently. I'd do my best to reinforce the fact that no matter what your past is, you can choose your future. Literacy would be a high priority. I'd have libraries full of culturally-responsive books in different languages. My students would not only develop literacy skills, but my lessons and attitude would develop students' love for reading and inquisitive minds and lifelong learners.

Student 5: I will focus on using ESL strategies and encourage the parents to get involved. I would stress the contributions of their extended families and members of their community. The homework would be written in both languages, English and Spanish, so families feel like a part of the school and their child's education.

Student 6: I would encourage parental involvement in all aspects of our classroom lessons and help others develop an appreciation for Hispanic culture. I would show non-Hispanics how much they have in common, and the richness of their differences.

Student 7: In addition to Hispanic Heritage Month, I would design the curriculum in a way that culture is weaved into every aspect of my teaching. We shouldn't celebrate our heritage once a month, because we are Hispanic all year around. I would use collaborative groups and a multisensory approach to learning, so students can learn in different ways, and they can demonstrate what they've learned according to their individualized strengths.

Student 8: I would focus on teaching my English speaking students a new language, so they can gain an understanding and sensitivity to how difficult it is to learn a new language. Students should understand how long it takes to master a second language, or even learn it enough to read a story. After all, how many people take a foreign language in school for many years, and then when they go to that country, they're still lost? All students in the class will realize the incredible energy and effort that goes into learning a new language.

I would also allow student to use their new first language to talk to and communicate with each other during recess, lunch, and group work. I would use multicultural literature in my classroom, along with magazines, newspapers, and online resources that reflect the diverse languages and cultures in my class.

Student 9: When I was learning to speak English, I was always nervous about speaking up in class. I thought I'd make a mistake, and everyone would laugh at me. One of my priorities would be to allow students to express themselves in any form they choose. Many Hispanics grew up listening to a variety of music, so I would use their interest in music to teach content material. When they feel comfortable enough to speak in class, they can volunteer to participate. The worst feeling is being put on the spot. I would also encourage parental involvement. My parents thought the teacher knew everything, and they didn't belong in the school. This will not be the case in my class.

Student 10: A test? This was my worst nightmare. I would use authentic, natural assessment to assess student learning. I would allow them to choose different types of projects and assignments to let them show what they've learned. Students would keep portfolios that would document their learning and growth in both their first and second languages. They would conference with their peers and with me, so they can clear up any misunderstandings or ask questions they may have without feeling scrutinized and intimidated. They will create study sheets during after school study sessions and review assignments in class, because I remember how difficult it was trying to finish my homework when I got home. I would use different ESL strategies like the use of pictures, bilingual dictionaries, extended time, and graphic organizers, to help them understand content. I would pair children up with someone who either needs their help or who can help them, so one can feel like the teacher and mentor. I would get to know each of my students and learn about their particular learning style. I would accentuate what they do best.

Question 5 - If you were speaking to a high school class, what would be some reasons you would give for going into the teaching profession? How would you encourage Hispanics to do this?

Survey Responses:

Student 1: As a Latino, they (Hispanics) have a greater influence on the students.

When students see that a person just like them become successful, they will believe in themselves more.

Student 2: I would explain what my home life was like and the obstacles I faced by not speaking the language and knowing this (American) culture. I will explain that teaching is a great career to build a family, because you can spend time with your own children and help them in school. Hispanics consider family a top priority, and the benefits of being a teacher allow you to spend a lot of quality time with your family. As a teacher, you can inspire young children and be a role model for them, so they can fulfill their dreams.

Student 3: I would speak to them about the amazing experience they would have as they teach children because teachers are looked up to as role models. After all, teachers spend more time with time with the students while they are in school than their parents do. Being able to help a child become educated and preparing them for their future feels exciting. Knowing that, as a teacher, you helped that child reach certain goals is gratifying. It truly makes you feel like you're doing something productive for the better of their future and for society.

Student 4: You really get to see yourself make a difference in small ways. Actually working with a child as they finally understand a difficult topic is the most rewarding experience. I would explain that teaching is a gift of the heart and mind. We touch children's hearts and educate their minds.

Student 5: I would encourage Hispanic high school students to get involved in teaching, because it is a profession that allows you to give back to your community and help children who are struggling in school. I would encourage Hispanics by explaining that there aren't many teachers who are Spanish, and there is a high demand for teachers who are bilingual. I would support them by directing them to tutoring jobs or volunteer opportunities, so they can get first-hand experiences with children. I would also organize visits to local colleges, so students can see and be part of a day at an actual college. I believe this experience would show them that going to college can be an attainable dream, and they wouldn't be intimidated by applying. This would help them make the decision if teaching is the right vocation for them. I strongly believe that once they teach a child and begin to make a difference, they'll be no turning back.

Student 6: I would explain that education equals empowerment. Knowledge and schools are the key to success, even though it may seem like a big investment of their time and money at the time. I would ask them to reflect on their own learning experiences, both positive and negative. Was there one teacher who made a difference in their lives? Wouldn't you want to be that teacher? It's all about making a difference.

Student 7: I would present statistics on how education affects income and the importance of doing well at school. I would emphasize using all of their Hispanic support systems to help them succeed in school, and I would give them resources, so they can get scholarships. I would try to draw out a concrete plan for them to follow and explain how I did it.

Student 8: Hispanics are very proud people, so I would talk to these high school students and explain how important their culture is. I would continue by telling them that children need Hispanics role models, so they can respond to students' diverse cultural and linguistic needs. Since they are so proud, wouldn't they want to share their heritage and customs with others and help other Latinos progress in school?

Student 9: I would communicate my passion for teaching and hope it was contagious. I would relay stories of when I worked with children during my field placements and observations and the children's reactions to my being there to work with them. I would read letters that students gave me to inspire them, and I would read these stories in both English and Spanish.

Student 10: I would ask the audience if they ever taught a sibling something or helped them with homework. Most likely, everyone would say that they did help someone in the past. Then, I would ask them to think about how they felt when their sibling understood what they were explaining. Finally, I'd ask them how their sibling felt when they "got it." That's why you become a teacher.

Question 6: What strategies did teachers use to help you learn English? Do you think you will use these methods?
Survey Responses:

Student 1: My teacher asked Hispanic parents to visit the class and work with the children who needed language support. Many parents came in, but mine had to work. At times, I felt excluded, but I really did benefit from having someone who spoke Spanish to me. I would try to work out a schedule for the parents that reflect their work schedule, so no one would feel slighted or left out.

Student 2: My teacher spoke more slowly, labeled the classroom in both languages, and tried to teach the other students in the class words in Spanish. She paired me off with someone, a buddy, who spoke English better than I did. Eventually, I felt confident enough to speak, but I was very self-conscious.

Student 3: Many of my teachers were frustrated by my inability to understand and communicate in English. They would get annoyed that I needed more time to answer a question or complete an assignment. After a while, they didn't call on me much, and I just sat there trying to find the courage to speak up. At first, I didn't speak at all, then I spoke with a friend, and then, eventually, after years, I participated in class. As a teacher, I wouldn't get frustrated by my students' inability to participate. Rather than getting annoyed at them, I would have them think of their responses, provide wait time, and then engage the student. I would do this for all of my students, because, after all, many students need additional time to think of thoughtful responses.

I would understand that speaking a language is a process, because I went through it myself. Initially, I wouldn't expect the student to jump in and participate. Rather, I'd give the child an opportunity to "grow into" the new language and build confidence.

Student 4: I had one wonderful English teacher who really got to know who I was. He would greet me every morning in Spanish and give me books in my language. He played Spanish music, and allowed us to create lyrics based on the topic we were learning about. We did a lot of group work, so I wasn't embarrassed to talk in front of the whole class. The homework assignments he gave were previews for the next day's lesson, so I had extra time to read over what was expected the next day. He was insightful, and I felt like he understood who I was. He changed my life, and I will use every strategy he used to positively affect my students.

Student 5: My elementary school teacher had many books on tape that I used to follow along with while reading. She also did many read alouds, and I pointed to each word as it was being read. She used the internet to read stories during break time. We were able to pick out our own online stories, and each word was highlighted as it was being read. We had to read these books over and over again and complete different activities with each story. These are ideas that I plan to use in my classes, because even if a parent isn't home, the child can go to the library and have a story read to them. I would even make CDs of these stories, so they can listen to English in the car as they are driving to school with their parents. I used to love those stories, because I didn't feel pressured to know every single word. I was able to go back and listen to these stories by myself without anyone knowing how behind I really was.

Student 6: The teacher I remember most vividly used whole class lessons, so either you got it, or you didn't. She walked up and down the aisles with her heavy book reading aloud and asking questions that I didn't understand. I was afraid to open my mouth, so I just went along with the rest of the class. She really didn't want us to talk much, so I felt relieved that I wasn't under that pressure, but when test time came, I earned very poor grades. She didn't differentiate instruction for any student in the class. She closely followed the directions in the book, and lessons weren't very creative. I learned a great deal from this teacher...how I don't want to be as a teacher. I don't even think she knew my name. My name is Rudchelle (Rochelle) and she kept calling me Rachel? I'm named after my father (Rudy) and my mother (Michelle), so I really didn't appreciate being called Rachel.

Student 7: My elementary school teacher (third grade) was Hispanic (from Cuba). She was very patient and after class, she talked to me about the importance of an education. She shared stories about when she came to this country and how difficult it was for her to get an education. She spoke to my mother in Spanish and gave her tips on how she could help me in school and with homework, even if she didn't understand English. She told my mother that an education was very important, and she stressed the importance of maintaining and cultivating our Puerto Rican traditions and language, while learning English.

As a teacher, I will do the same for my Hispanic students. I will extend myself to the Hispanic community and make them aware of preserving their culture. They must keep their traditions alive, yet they must learn English and about the American system of education.

Student 8: My teacher treated me like everyone else in the class. Her lessons were geared toward the child who was on grade level, and she didn't try to differentiate instruction at all. Her textbooks were labeled fourth grade, and she followed the book closely. The struggling students stayed lost, the brighter students were bored, and the middle students were the ones who benefitted from this type of teaching. She walked up and down the aisles, never allowed group work, and she didn't allow talking in her class. She made sure we knew that we were supposed to speak English at all times, even in the halls and during recess. She never used technology, she just followed the textbook and the class schedule. I now realize how important it is to differentiate instruction for different types of learners, especially English as a Second Language learners. I also see the value of cooperative learning, dialoguing with peers, and individualization.

Student 9: My teacher repeated important phrases several times and allowed us to use these words in our speaking, reading, and writing. She started the year with just a few important words, and then she added words every week. She emphasized that many of the words in Spanish are similar to ones in English, and she created a chart with these words. At the time, this built up my confidence, because I was able to master a few words at a time. She taught us new vocabulary words before starting an important topic, and we spent a great deal of time using these words in context, with pictures, and with each other. She incorporated technology, so we could see, hear, and experience the new words. That's why I love vocabulary so much. She made the words come to life. She occasionally mispronounced words in Spanish, so when I mispronounced words in English, it was fine.

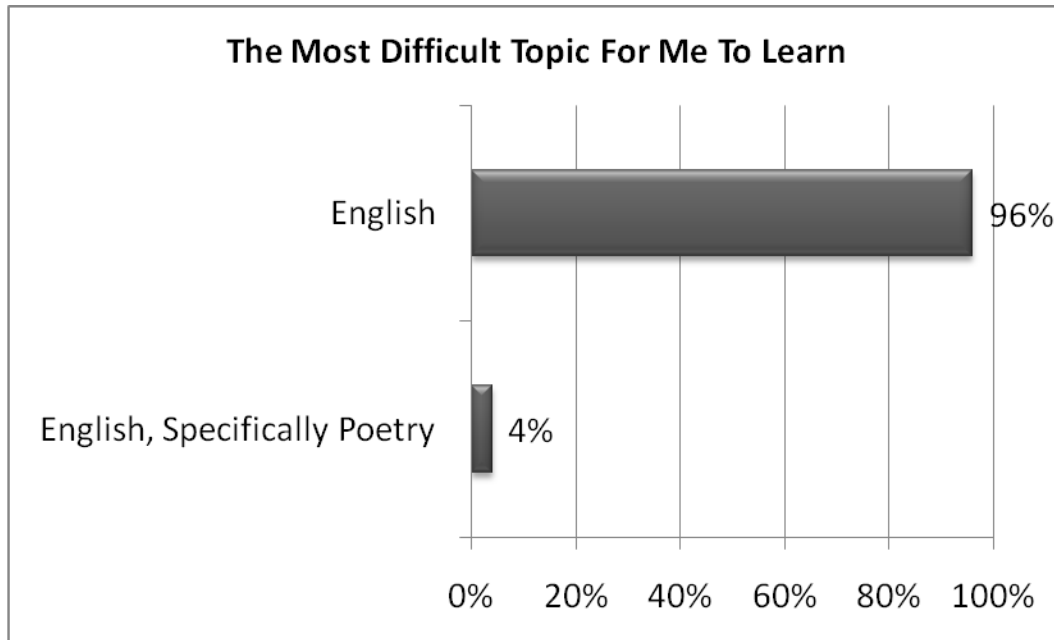
Student 10: When I was taking a test, my teacher paraphrased some of the questions. She realized that I knew the answer, but I was just unsure of what the question was asking for. She used simply stated questions that were worded similarly to the ones given on the review sheet. She guided my thinking by prompting my responses and jogging my memory with "Do you remember how we broke up words into parts? This question has to do with the experiment we did in class." She gave hints that guided my thinking. Her board notes were in outline format, so I wasn't very distracted by lots of words in long paragraphs. Sometimes she would provide handouts that were double spaced, so I was able to translate the sentences into my own words. . She also used different color markers to highlight the important words in a passage.

Question 7 - What was the most difficult topic for you to learn? Why do you think it was so hard to learn?

Survey Responses:

Ninety-six of the respondents said that English was the most difficult subject for them to learn. They commented that science and social studies books were the most difficult to understand, because of the extensive vocabulary. They also commented that after fourth grade, learning English became more difficult, because there weren't as many pictures in the textbooks to support their comprehension, and larger amounts of information was required to understand. Four percent of the respondents replied that English, specifically poetry, was difficult for them to learn. Literal and figurative language, metaphors and similes didn't make sense at first.

Chart IV



Interview: Ana, Cuban, First generation Hispanic, 11 years in the U.S.

The reason my major is English is because that was one of the most difficult class for me. I understand how frustrating and difficult learning a new language is, so I would be more sympathetic to others who can't communicate in English. I want my Hispanic students to revisit where they came from by using literature and storytelling to improve their learning and help them fit in. I want them to understand how the English language is so important for success in school, but they can still keep their own language and culture. They need to remember where they came from.

Question 10. What was some of the obstacles you faced trying to become a teacher?

Survey Responses:

Student 1: Public Speaking. I was very shy, but I have worked on it. Now I am much better at speaking in front of people. It's even easier to speak in front of children, which I love. They are not as judgmental.

Student 2: None. I am one of the first people to go to college in my family, and my family is very proud of my decision.

Student 3: It's a little hard trying to picture myself in an actual class. Sometimes it boggles my mind how close I am to actually being a teacher. I think my own confidence is holding me back, but if I made it this far, I will achieve my goals.

Student 4: Deciding what age group was really difficult for me, because I love both elementary and secondary grades for different reasons. I've decided to stick with elementary grade students, because I believe that if a child has a strong beginning, he will be strong throughout his education.

Student 5: My family kept telling me it wasn't a high paying job and that I should aspire to become a lawyer or doctor. Somehow, I just knew those professions weren't for me. To me, money was secondary, but I understand why they emphasized making a good salary. It was because they didn't have the money or opportunity to go to school, so they just wanted me to make the most of my education.

Student 6: Teasing. Being a male, Hispanic elementary school teacher is not highly regarded in my family or in society. My friends and family ridiculed me, even when I was in college.

Everyone accepts having a female teacher, but I believe that Hispanics need strong male role models in their early years. Especially when many Hispanics where I live are single mothers, a confident, competent man will make a difference in a child's education and in their lives.

Student 7: Money was a huge obstacle for my family. Since I was the first one in my family to go to college, they didn't understand about scholarships, loans, and financial aid. They initially wanted me to go straight to work and contribute to the family, but I wanted to go to a private college. We could only afford a community college. We compromised, and I attended a two year community college first, and then transferred to the private four year college that I initially wanted to go to. I worked part-time and went to school at the same time.

Student 8: Money was an issue for me. I knew this was going to be a problem, so I stayed after school my entire junior and senior year and took SAT prep classes offered by my high school. My guidance counselor told me about programs offered to Hispanics who did well in school and provided information about scholarship programs. I commute to College and work on campus, so my problem was solved.

Student 9: My language skills are a problem. To become a teacher, I must take three tests to get licensed, and each of these tests has an essay that I must complete. I've already failed one of the tests, that I plan to take over, but I'm not sure how well I'll perform on the others. Writing was never my strength, in either language, so I don't foresee doing well on these tests. I hope my writing skills are adequate enough to pass these tests. I'm not feeling very confident about passing.

Student 10: I haven't faced any obstacles. I'm so excited about having my own class in the fall.

Discussion/conclusion:

Hispanic pre-service teachers look forward to making a difference in the lives of their students and want to devote their energies to creating an academic and social environment that addresses the needs of all of its members. Diversity in schools benefit all children. After all, how can we encourage our Latino students to become teachers, if we don't have positive role models representing their culture? Pre-service teachers pursue the teaching profession for many different reasons and because of many different influences, but all believe that it's critical for students to view the classroom as a safe place where their culture is being valued and accepted. The presence of a considerate, competent Latino teacher may encourage students, as well as parents, to pursue their education, and be the medium for success for the Hispanic community. A Hispanic teacher may create an accessible, symbiotic relationship between the school and Hispanic parents and community that will ultimately enrich academic success and forge strong partnerships.

By having more Hispanics in the teaching field, children will have culturally responsive, relatable role models to emulate. Parents will have a representative to drive communication with the school and provide suggestions for working with their children. Future teachers are the conduits for dramatic educational change, because they are dedicated to helping every child become successful, especially those who have English as their second language. Undergraduate and graduate programs should be designed to accentuate the positive contributions of the Hispanic culture.

Initiatives and supports designed to attract Hispanic prospective teachers must be created to increase the number and diversity of teaching candidates, to create opportunities and to empower the Hispanic community. "Si tu puedes tocar el corazon y su mente, el nino va a suceder" (Pedro).

Survey Instrument

Appendix I

Part I – Multiple Choice

1. **The single most influential person who encouraged me to become a teacher was**
 - a. My parents/guardians
 - b. A teacher
 - c. A student that affected my life
 - d. Other
2. **The reason I was to become a teacher is**
 - a. To help all children
 - b. To become a positive role model for Hispanic children
 - c. To make my family proud
 - d. Other (please specify)

3. The teaching profession is

- a. Very respected in my culture
- b. Respected in my culture
- c. Somewhat respected in my culture
- d. Not respected in my culture

Part II – Open Ended Questions

4. Once you become a full-time teacher, what are two priorities you'd focus on to help your Hispanic students succeed both academically and socially?
5. If you were speaking to a high school class, what would be some reasons you'd give for going into the teaching profession? How would you encourage Hispanics to do this?
6. What strategies did teachers use to help you learn English? Why do you think these methods worked for you?
7. What was the most difficult topic for you to learn? Why do you think it was so hard to learn?
8. If a Hispanic student expressed an interest in teaching, what advice would you give him/her?
9. What were some obstacles that you faced when trying to learn English?
10. What was an obstacle you faced trying to become a teacher?

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