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Improving Student Engagement: An Evaluation  
of the Latinos in Action Program

Jose E. Enriquez

A dissertation submitted to the faculty of  
Brigham Young University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

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## ABSTRACT

### Improving Student Engagement: An Evaluation of the Latinos in Action Program

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Doctor of Philosophy

Hispanic students make up 12% of the enrollment in Utah elementary and secondary schools but only 3.4% of the enrollment at Utah's colleges and universities, according to Alemán and Rorrer (2006). The intervention Latinos in Action (LIA) seeks to increase high school completion and college graduation rates among emergent bilingual Latinos by involving them as paraprofessional literacy tutors for younger Spanish-speaking students. This dissertation, written in article-ready style, reports on two studies of the program. Study 1, a survey of 128 high school students, found that those involved in the service and literacy program scored higher than their bilingual Latino peers who were not involved on two dimensions of high school engagement: level of education desired and feelings that school contributed to increased self-understanding. Study 2, a coding analysis of 200 LIA student journals, demonstrated a high level of reflectivity across three emerging themes: satisfaction with the tutee's progress, growth in leadership and social skills, and increased drive for school success. Implications for educators and program administrators are discussed.

Although intended for separate publication, the studies inform each other in important ways. For example, the qualitative finding in Study 1 that LIA students more than their non-LIA peers view school as important to their self-understanding correlates with the qualitative finding in Study 2 that 80% of LIA journal writers employed self-reflective language to describe experiences in LIA—indicating perhaps that elements of the program prompt the kind of thinking and communication that enhances understanding of self. Similarly, the new confidence and determination to succeed in school expressed by LIA journal writers supports the Study 1 finding that LIA students target higher levels of post-secondary education than do their non-LIA peers. Specific journal entries provide a window into how that growth in ambition comes to be.

Within the hybrid dissertation format, Appendix A provides a literature review linking both studies. Appendix B gives detailed coding methods for Study 2. Appendix C combines the findings of both studies in a general discussion.

Keywords: emergent bilinguals, High School Survey of Student Engagement, writing to learn, paraprofessional training, Latinos in higher education

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## DESCRIPTION OF STRUCTURE AND CONTENT

This dissertation uses a hybrid format; that is, it takes the form of a two publication-ready articles, supplemented by additional materials. A detailed literature review supporting both studies, a detailed methods section expounding on Study 2, and a general discussion linking the findings can be found in appendices following the articles.

Both studies examine the intervention Latinos in Action (LIA), a repeatable elective course for junior high and high school students who speak some English and some Spanish. Led by an advisor with cultural expertise, LIA students train as paraprofessional literacy tutors and then volunteer hundreds of hours assisting at-risk students at local elementary schools. Goals of the program include keeping Latino students enrolled in school and priming them to succeed in higher education.

Since its inception with one Utah high school in 2001, LIA has grown exponentially. For the 2011–12 school year, the program enrolled a total of 1375 students at over 60 schools. For more than a decade, every student enrolled in Latinos in Action has graduated from high school—compared to a 26% dropout rate for Utah’s Latinos in general (2008 figure from U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). The intervention is growing in importance as schools try to meet the needs of the nation’s burgeoning Hispanic population.

In seeking to better understand LIA’s role in assisting Latino students, the present studies asked the following:

1. How strongly does participation in LIA correlate with school engagement, goals for higher education, and drive for school success?
2. What do LIA participants identify as most influential or meaningful to their personal growth?

Two studies, one quantitative and one qualitative, were conducted to evaluate program efficacy and provide important information for educators and administrators. Study 1 used a translated version of the High School Survey of Student Engagement to compare the goals and attitudes of 128 bilingual Latino students (86 who participated in LIA and 42 who did not). Study 2 looked more closely at the experiences of 200 LIA students through a coded thematic analysis of students' classroom journals. Together, the studies indicate that LIA's emphasis on reflectivity—the process through which students explore new ideas about themselves and their world—contributes to students' increased self-understanding and determination to succeed in high school and beyond.

ARTICLE 1

Latinos in Action: Improving High School Engagement

### **Article 1 Abstract**

Hispanics students make up 12% of the enrollment in Utah elementary and secondary schools but only 3.4% of the enrollment at Utah's colleges and universities (Alemán & Rorrer, 2006). The intervention program Latinos in Action seeks to increase high school completion and college graduation rates among emergent bilingual Latinos by involving them as paraprofessional literacy tutors for younger Spanish-speaking students. A survey of 128 high school students found that those involved in the service and literacy program scored higher than their bilingual Latino peers who were not involved on two dimensions of high school engagement: level of education desired and feelings that school contributed to increased self-understanding. Implications for educators and program administrators are discussed.

*Keywords:* emergent bilinguals, High School Survey of Student Engagement, paraprofessional training, Latinos in higher education

## **Background**

Hispanics make up a growing proportion of students within U.S. schools. Yet schools do not seem to be meeting their needs. For example, in 2009, 17.6% of Latinos ages 16 to 24 were not in school and had not completed high school or an alternative credential (NCES, 2011, p. 8). In Utah, where over 50 schools had a Hispanic student body population of 50% or more in the school year 2008–09, recent noncompletion rates were even more staggering: During 2008, 26% of Utah’s Latino students dropped out (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

Also of concern to educators in Utah and throughout the nation are Hispanics’ lower test scores (Alemán & Rorrer, 2006; Institute of Education Sciences, n.d., a & b) and limited college enrollment and attendance. Villalpando (personal communication, December 2011) used current matriculation figures to estimate that from a representative group of 100 Latino elementary-age students, 40 are expected to graduate from high school (compared to 84 in a group of Caucasian Utah students); 4 are predicted to graduate from college (compared to 26 Caucasians); 1 is predicted to complete graduate school of any kind (compared to 10 Caucasians); and 1 is predicted to earn a doctorate (the same figure for Caucasians). The low rate of college graduation among Latinos limits the number of bilingual Hispanic teachers available to serve as role models for students (Trevino, 2011). As the country becomes more racially diverse, the growing Hispanic population must not be ignored.

### **Growth of Hispanic Population**

From 2000 to 2010, the overall percentage of Hispanic residents in the U.S. population grew from 12.5% to 16.3%, accounting for more than half (15.2 million) of the nation’s total population growth (27.3 million; U.S. Census Bureau, 2010; as also interpreted in Ramirez, 2011). The Census Bureau (2010) projects that Hispanics will make up 30.3% of the population

by 2050 (see also Ramirez, 2011). With the majority of the 2000 to 2010 Hispanic growth coming through births (64.2%) rather than immigration (35.8%), it is no surprise that Hispanics account for nearly one quarter (23.1%) of the total U.S. population under age 18 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010; Ramirez, 2011). This growth brings serious implications for the nation's public schools as they seek to meet the needs of Latino students.

### **Student Demographics**

With 10 million Hispanic students in kindergarten through Grade 12 (Fry & Gonzales, 2008), Hispanics are the fastest-growing minority group in public schools. One nonpartisan research group, the Pew Hispanic Center, reported that the years 1990–2006 saw the number of Hispanic public school students nearly double, with 60% of new enrollments coming from Hispanic students (Fry & Gonzales, 2008). Fry and Gonzales (2008) estimated that in the U.S. in 1990 one in eight public school students was Hispanic, compared to one in five in 2008. Looking ahead, by 2050 the number of non-Hispanic school-age children is predicted to grow by 4%, while the number of Hispanic, non-white school-age children is predicted to grow by 166% (Fry & Gonzales, 2008; see also Spring, 1996).

Similar trends are found within the state of Utah. In 1980, just 4% of Utah's K-12 students were Latino (Alemán & Rorrer, 2006). That figure grew to 11.47% by 2004 and to 12.2% for 2006 (Alemán & Rorrer, 2006). With such rapid growth in the number of Hispanic students, schools need to develop an infrastructure to support these students (Morgan, Ashbaker, & Enriquez, 2004).

### **Challenges for Hispanic Students**

Students of Hispanic origin, especially those with limited English proficiency, face many challenges within and without the public school system. Externally, high levels of poverty

(Alexander, Entwisle, & Kabbani, 2001; Hauser, Simmons, & Pager, 2000), low levels of parental education, and uncertainty about housing (Swanson & Schneider, 1999) and immigration status (Ream & Stanton-Salazar, 2007) mean that many Hispanic students feel pressure to help their families survive. Time that might otherwise be devoted to study or extra-curricular activities may instead be needed for part-time employment or the tending of siblings while parents work (Ream & Rumberger, 2008).

**Cultural disconnects that limit school success.** Within the school system, Hispanic students must navigate expectations that are sometimes foreign in terms of both language and culture. Difficulties can arise from structural inequalities and discontinuities; in other words, from differences between the students' culture and cultural expectations and the dominant culture of the educational system (Ogbu, 1982; Ogbu, 1987). Students from Hispanic backgrounds often come to school with insufficient social and cultural capital, the resources that accrue through upbringing, surroundings, and social connections with instrumental people (Bourdieu, 1985). They also must learn new sociolinguistic codes that will allow them to decipher communication nuances from teachers and peers of differing backgrounds (Bernstein, 1977). At the same time, Hispanic students associate with peers who view the school system as "White" and, therefore, school success as betrayal of culture and identity (Kuperminc, Blatt, Shahar, Henrich, & Leadbetter, 2004). Teachers and administrators who make racial assumptions or lack cultural sensitivity (Mayes, Cutri, Rogers, & Montero, 2006) can contribute to students' feelings of insecurity and isolation at school.

**Lack of school engagement.** Another area where Latino students lag behind is in school engagement, a measure of students' involvement in formal and informal school-related activities. School engagement has been often cited (e.g., Carini, Kuh, & Klein, 2006; Fredricks,

Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004; Zhao & Kuh, 2004) as a predictor of secondary and post-high school academic success. Ream & Rumberger (2008) examined the relationship between school engagement and friendship networks for Mexican American students and their White, non-Latino peers and found that, by comparison, the Mexican American students were “less engaged in unorganized academic endeavors and formally sponsored extracurricular activities” (p. 109). This led the Mexican American students to associate more readily with peers who were not academically minded, a phenomenon linked to dropping out.

Linked to school engagement and academic goals is the number of Hispanic students who register for advanced coursework in high school. Except for foreign language Advanced Placement classes, which enroll double the rate of Latinos than Whites, a much smaller percentage of Latinos than Whites sign up for Advanced Placement courses in English, mathematics, and science nationwide (Llagas & Snyder, 2003).

Not surprisingly, this trend extends into the college arena. For 2005–06, Latino students made up 12% of the elementary and secondary student population in Utah, but only 3.4% of the enrollment at institutions of higher education (Alemán & Rorrer, 2006, p. 31). When Latino students do enroll for college, wrote Villalpando (2006), they “are not only concentrated in institutions considered to be of lesser prestige and with fewer resources, such as the community colleges, but can expect to attain lower levels of academic achievement—and social mobility—as a result of attending these types of institutions” (p. 39; quoted in Alemán & Rorrer, p. 32).

Clearly there is a need for education that deals with this cultural disconnect, a process wherein students and school professionals learn from one another. The student needs time to learn and grow within the system, and the system needs to learn more about the student and his or her cultural background in order to provide mentoring that works. Missing from most schools

is a vehicle that will allow ethnic minority students to grow, explore, and perform the essential functions needed to excel in the classroom. However, some schools are working to create such a vehicle through a promising intervention program called Latinos in Action (LIA).

### **Promising Intervention: Latinos in Action (LIA)**

The only major initiative of its type in Utah, Latinos in Action operated in 60 Utah schools for school year 2011–2012. So far for 2012–13, about 85 secondary schools, along with their cooperating elementary schools, have requested to participate. The program enrolled about 1375 students for the 2011–12 school year and has involved an estimated 4380 secondary students since its beginning with one class of 35 students in 2001. In contrast to other prominent intervention programs, which generally operate on an extracurricular basis, Latinos in Action is a repeatable, credit-earning elective course within the school day. The program combines the advantages of peer mentoring with the strengths of students' bicultural, bilingual backgrounds and the framework of best-practice literacy training.

Open to all students with grade point averages of 2.0 or higher who speak some Spanish and some English, LIA is offered at both the high school and junior high levels. The program seeks to enhance the social, cognitive, and linguistic abilities of Latino students while allowing them to mentor younger Latino peers. The intervention concentrates on Latino students in the K-12 pipeline in an attempt to lower dropout rates and encourage higher education. A secondary goal of LIA is to give Latino students experience in the field of education, with the hope that some will choose to pursue teaching as a career—thus increasing the number of Latino educators and role models in schools.

**Service learning.** The LIA teacher (or “advisor”) uses a specified curriculum focused on leadership and service learning. In Latinos in Action class, students are trained to become

paraprofessional literacy educators. They then spend over 100 hours in local schools, translating for parents and tutoring younger students, many of whom are English language learners.

Rhodes, Grossman, and Resch (2000) showed that cross-age peer mentoring relationships were particularly valuable in raising at-risk children's self-appraisals of their academic potential and the value they saw in school. The Utah State Office of Education specifically recommends the use of cross-age peer mentoring, particularly in conjunction with state-sponsored literacy efforts (S. Okroy, personal communication, March 30, 2012). Like the paraprofessionals studied by Ashbaker and Morgan (2012), who tended to speak the same language as students and their parents, LIA students use their language skills and mentoring influence to help at-risk younger students and their families.

**Cultural supports.** Students who enroll in LIA receive a variety of cultural supports, including presentations from prominent Latino business people and educators, and after-school opportunities to rehearse and perform cultural dances. The program advisor is generally a teacher at the high school or junior high with a high level of cultural understanding, such as a Spanish teacher or an individual who has lived and studied abroad; ideally, this individual is also Hispanic. As such, the advisor becomes an important institutional agent for helping students access social networks (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Portes, 1998). For example, the advisor introduces students to strategies that will help them engage in their secondary schools and prepare for college (such as requiring students to participate in at least one extracurricular activity beyond LIA). The advisor also provides one-on-one help with applications for admission and financial aid as needed.

**Indications of program success.** Previous data seem to confirm that LIA is working. So far, every student enrolled in Latinos in Action has graduated from high school. In 2010, 85% of

graduating LIA seniors went on to college, almost all with significant scholarship awards. In recognition of LIA's success, the nationwide outreach program AmeriCorps chose the LIA for sponsorship beginning in 2008, helping to provide some funds for administration and growth. Additionally, the Utah State Office of Education partnered with LIA to provide literacy training manuals (through Student Tutoring Achievement for Reading, or STAR, 2010).

### **Research Purpose**

LIA's exponential growth and apparently significant outcomes make the program an important focus of study. The present research explored how strongly participation in LIA correlated with school engagement, goals for higher education, and drive for school success.

### **Method**

Latino students who were involved in LIA, and a control group of Latino students who were not involved in LIA, completed surveys on their attitudes about high school and higher education. As noted, high school engagement has been seen as a significant predictor of secondary school success and matriculation to college (Carini et al., 2006; Fredricks et al., 2004; Ream & Rumberger, 2008; Zhao & Kuh, 2004). Specifically, the survey quantitatively measured student responses to a variety of questions about school experiences and plans for college.

### **Instrument**

A variation of the High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE; Indiana University Center for Evaluation and Educational Policy, 2008/2009), asked specific questions (listed, in part, below) to assess the student's engagement in the high school environment and his or her goals for education after high school. The instrument was provided to students in both

English and Spanish, with the Spanish translation developed by three professionals affiliated with Latinos in Action and Brigham Young University.

Questions asked students to agree or disagree with statements on Likert-type items, such as “Adults in this school want me to succeed,” “I have the skills and ability to complete my work,” “I am motivated to work by . . . ,” and “I can be who I am at this school.” Questions also asked students to report how often they engaged in behaviors like “Talked to a teacher about your classwork”; “Talked to an adult at school about career goals . . . and how to apply for college”; and “Discussed ideas from readings or classes with others outside of class (friends, family members, coworkers, etc.)” For the LIA group, three open-ended questions were asked, as well.

### **Participants and Setting**

The survey was administered by classroom teachers, during class time, to full-time Latino students, grades 10–12, in five suburban high schools in Utah at the end of the 2008–09 school year. Data collection was scheduled late enough in the school year so that the LIA participants had already completed some volunteer work as student paraeducators for younger students. Bilingual Latino students made up 10% of the combined student body of the five schools.

All Latinos in Action students in grades 10–12 were invited to participate in the survey, as were a control group comprising a random sample of non-LIA bilingual Latino students with a GPA of at least 2.0 (the threshold for participation in LIA) at each of the five schools. Of the 235 selected students, just over 50% (128) completed surveys that could be used—86 within the LIA program and 42 outside the program. The rest of the students could not take the survey because they failed to turn in parental consent forms. For the 128 usable surveys, the total number of female respondents (81; 63%) exceeded the number of male respondents (47; 36.7%).

Specifically, 56 (65%) of the LIA respondents were female and 25 (59.5%) of the non-LIA respondents were female. This is somewhat reflective of the gender breakdown within most LIA classes, which are usually about 60% female.

The survey took approximately 45 minutes to complete. Students were told that no grade would be associated with the survey, that responses were confidential and that participation was voluntary. Students who were not in class at the time of survey administration did not participate in the study.

Following administration of the survey, participant information, including grade point averages (GPAs) over time and attendance records were collected from school files. This confirmed that all survey participants had GPAs of 2.0 or higher.

### **Data Analysis**

The surveys were purchased from Indiana University and analyzed by Scantron. Once the data were compiled and returned from Indiana, researchers matched students' GPA and attendance with their survey engagement indicators.

The data from Indiana were analyzed using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences, 2010). Three regression models were used to examine two target domains: Model 1 examined social factors (by analyzing social network, or their feelings of connectedness to peers and adults at school); Model 2 examined cognitive factors (by analyzing academic achievement); and Model 3 examined other cognitive factors (by analyzing desired educational attainment).

As shown in the diagrams of our models (Figures 1–3), we examined the variable *participation in the Latinos in Action program* to see whether it had a positive relationship to participants' *higher educational goals* (our dependent variable). We included the variables *school engagement*, *self-esteem*, and *ethnic relations* as mediators because we believed they

might affect the relationship between LIA and our dependent variable. We controlled for *gender*, *language spoken at home*, *income* (measured by eligibility to receive free or reduced price lunch), *family issues*, and *parental education*.

The dependent variable, *higher educational goals* (Q31a), was measured as a categorical, Likert-type item, with the following scale: 0 = *don't know/not applicable*, 1 = *will not finish high school*, 2 = *high school diploma or GED*, 3 = *community college or trade school degree*, 4 = *four-year college degree*, 5 = *master's degree or higher*.

**Model 1: Regression model for social network (social domain).** The dependent variable in the social network model was the *strength of the social networks*, as reported by respondents. The variable *social network strength* was a composite variable comprising several questions: “How often have you . . .

- discussed grades with teachers (Q6r)
- discussed ideas from readings or classes with teachers outside of class (Q6s)
- discussed ideas from readings or classes with others outside of class (Q6t)
- talked to an adult in the school about career goals (Q6w)
- talked to an adult in the school about how to apply for college (Q6x)?”

These questions were selected because they indicated whether students utilized the networks they already possessed. In answering that they used these networks, students confirmed the networks' existence.

The key independent variable for social networking was *participation in the LIA program*. The model also included the control variables of *language spoken at home* (Q27e and Q27s) as a mediating variable, *income* (as measured by students' report of their eligibility for free/reduce school lunch, Q30fl), *parents' education* (Q32a), *grades* (Q33a), *gender* (Q3a), and

*year in school* (Q1a). Race or ethnicity was not used as a control because it was assumed to be constant.

Regression analysis was used to estimate the effectiveness of the LIA program in assisting students to build social networks with competent adults. Results were compared between LIA and non-LIA students. Significant differences would show that LIA students have a larger social network to draw from and that they use the resources available to them from their network.

**Model 2: Regression model for academic achievement (cognitive domain).** The dependent variable for the academic achievement model was measured by the *difference in GPA* for participants in the LIA program versus nonparticipants. This second model also included *school engagement, school attendance, and self-esteem* as mediating variables, with *income, language spoken at home, parents' education, gender, and year in school* as controls. The key independent variable in the academic achievement model was *participation in the LIA program*. Through regression analysis, a significant result would indicate that participation in the LIA program correlated with an increase in GPA.

**Model 3: Regression model for desired educational attainment (cognitive domain).** The dependent variable for the desired educational attainment model was measured by LIA and non-LIA student responses to the question “How far do you want to go in your schooling?” *Social network strength, caring institutional agent, school engagement, and self-esteem* were included in the model as mediating variables. This model also included *income, parental education, gender, and year in school* as controls. Again, the key independent variable in the model was *participation in the LIA program*. Through regression analysis, a significant result

would indicate that students who participated in the LIA program planned to attain higher levels of education than did students who did not participate in the program.

### **Results by Theme**

Of all of the variables described, three had statistically significant differences in means across the two groups: (a) *school's contribution to self-understanding*, (b) *language spoken at home*, and (c) *desired level of education* (see Table 1).

#### **School's Contribution to Self-Understanding.**

We tested LIA's correlation with self-esteem in Model 3. The adjusted R-square showed that the model accounted for 14.6% of the difference in the data results. LIA came out with an unstandardized beta of .643 and a standardized beta of .272, which was statistically significant, but slightly less so than in Models 1 and 2 ( $p < .05$ ). The variable *self-esteem* was divided into *school contributed to growth in understanding self* and *school contributed to growth in developing personal beliefs and values*. The unstandardized betas were .359 and .076, respectively, showing that for an increase of 1 in the variable, there were increases of .252 and .044 for the latter two questions. The former was statistically significant at  $p < .05$ . The second element of self-esteem was not statistically significant.

#### **Language Spoken at Home**

More difficult to interpret was the tendency of LIA students more than non-LIA students to say they speak Spanish at home (mean = .96 for LIA, mean = .83 for non-LIA). There was no significant difference in participation if there was another language spoken at home besides English or Spanish (such as Portuguese or Samoan; .04 for non-LIA, .07 for LIA).

We analyzed LIA in terms of ethnic relations in a fourth model, with the R-squared statistic at .100 (one of the lowest of our models). LIA had an unstandardized beta of .778 and a standardized beta of .336, which was once again significant at  $p < .01$ . *Ethnic relations* was based on two criteria: *had conversations/worked on a project with at least one student of a different race/ ethnicity* and *had conversations/worked on a project with at least one student of a different income background, personal values, religious beliefs or political opinions*. These had unstandardized betas of .138 and -.097 (respectively) and standardized betas of .106 and -.077 (respectively). Neither of these mediating mechanisms produced measurably significant effects.

### **Desired Level of Education**

The strongest finding of Study 1 was found in Model 3, the regression model for desired educational attainment. On this variable, participants of Latinos in Action had an unstandardized beta of .728. This finding showed that students in the LIA program marked .728 points higher (unstandardized beta) on the question of educational goals, which was statistically significant at the  $p < .01$  level. The same statistical significance stood for the standardized beta of .307, which showed the strength of the relationship that those in LIA were .307 points more likely to say they would pursue higher educational goals.

### **Discussion**

Although no causation could be determined in a study of this type, particularly given our small sample size ( $N = 128$ ), the primary conclusion was that participation in the Latinos in Action program indeed correlated with greater expectations of continuing education beyond high school. Compared to their bilingual, non-LIA peers, LIA students were more likely to view

school as an important contributor to their self-understanding, and they were more likely to report speaking Spanish at home.

### **Explanation of Findings**

To help interpret the quantitative findings, we examined various LIA program features that might be associated with the study's main correlations. Although not borne out conclusively in our results, hypotheses about the effects of program components are offered as a starting point for future research.

**Post-secondary ambitions.** The finding that LIA students were planning for college was not surprising, given the LIA program's strong emphasis on continuing education. It is possible that LIA students grew in their drive to finish college as they interacted with younger students in a paraprofessional capacity. Perhaps students caught a glimpse of their potential as mentors, translators, and educators—competencies that their advisors emphasized could be best utilized with the advanced training and certification that university programs afford. It is also possible that the step-by-step coaching provided by LIA advisors and successful Latinos from the community helped students believe in their own potential to qualify for college and meet the expenses and demands of higher education.

**Quest for identity.** We hypothesized that several program components might relate to the finding among LIA students more than non-LIA students that school contributed to growth in understanding self and to developing personal beliefs and values. For example, LIA students spent class time discussing their journey toward finding their place within American culture without losing their personal identities. Writing assignments, journal prompts, and experiences with other successful Hispanics were all designed to contribute to Latino students' growing sense of individual worth. The LIA curriculum, especially when employed by skilled advisors, also

invited students to challenge inaccurate or limiting beliefs about themselves and their heritage. As such, the experience of LIA should indeed have contributed to students' beliefs and values, particularly the value they placed on their own culture and their own abilities as bilingual student paraeducators.

**Preservation of heritage.** A somewhat puzzling finding was that LIA students more often than their non-LIA bilingual peers reported that they spoke Spanish at home. We interpreted this finding to mean possibly that students in LIA have grown to value their cultural heritage and abilities as bilinguals enough to value speaking Spanish in their personal lives. On the other hand, the finding could indicate that students whose families spoke mostly Spanish were more interested in signing up for the elective LIA course in the first place, possibly because these students felt greater ties to their Hispanic heritage or because they were more comfortable with their Spanish-speaking ability than their Latino peers whose families may have been in the U.S. for a greater amount of time and no longer spoke Spanish at home. Here again, our survey left us with many areas for future study.

### **Limitations**

The limited sample size for the survey was a disappointment. Students seemed more than willing to complete the surveys, but less than willing to bring back their forms with parental consent to be a research subject, even though the forms were translated into simplified Spanish and multiple reminders were given. In the future, program administrators might consider sending consent forms with school packets at the beginning of the year, attached to the media release forms that are required for participation in LIA.

For parents, worries over documentation status may have contributed to not signing the consent form. Students in LIA are assured repeatedly that their advisors want to help them get to

college—regardless of their immigration status. However, those assurances do little to take away fears of possible deportation or of families being split up. Future researchers will need to find better ways to assuage parents' fears.

A secondary limitation was the affiliation of the principal researcher. As the founder and director of LIA, he was personally acquainted with the teachers and administrators involved in this study and with many of the respondents, as well. While it is unlikely that students modified their answers to please the researcher, who was not one of their teachers, it is always possible in a study of this nature that the researcher may maintain bias both in questions asked and in interpreting responses.

### **Implications for Educators**

Administrators seeking to meet the unique needs of Latino students may find it useful to frame their efforts in terms of increasing Latino students' engagement at school. Specifically, intervention programs that involve bilingual service experiences may be particularly effective in increasing students' feelings of belonging, along with self-understanding of culture and potential—translating into increased self-efficacy and drive for school success.

### **Conclusion**

The Latinos in Action program, with its dual focus on service and literacy, seems to be enhancing school engagement on at least two important dimensions. Compared to non-LIA peers, students who participated in LIA reported significantly higher aspirations for college and a significantly higher perception that school contributed to their understanding of themselves.

The present study is only the beginning of evaluation efforts. Future studies of Latinos in Action and of similar programs will further clarify best practices for school-sponsored interventions that help Latino students achieve post-secondary success.

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Table 1

*Results of High School Survey of Student Engagement for LIA and non-LIA Students*

	Non-LIA	LIA
School engagement		
Feel good about school	3.44	3.40
Important part of high school community	2.89	2.99
Engaged at school	2.98	3.09
Self-esteem		
School contributed to growth in understanding self	2.17**	2.47**
School contributed to growth in developing personal belief and values	2.35**	2.60**
Ethnic relations		
Had conversations or worked on a project with at least one student of a different race/ethnicity from you	2.20	2.07
Had conversations or worked on a project with at least one student of a different income background, personal values, religious beliefs or political opinions from you	2.28	2.09
Tutor's gender	.40	.35
Highest level of parental education	2.09	2.27
Eligible to receive free or reduced-price lunches at your high school	1.11	.98
Family issues		
Reason for attending school: your parents	.48	.58
Would drop out because of family issues	.08	.06
Language spoken at home		
Speak Spanish at home	.83**	.96**
Speak another language at home	.04	.07
Highest level of education desired	3.71****	4.44****

*Note.* Non-LIA  $n = 42$ , LIA  $n = 86$ .

\* $p < .10$ , \*\* $p < .05$ , \*\*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\*\* $p < .001$  (2-tailed tests).

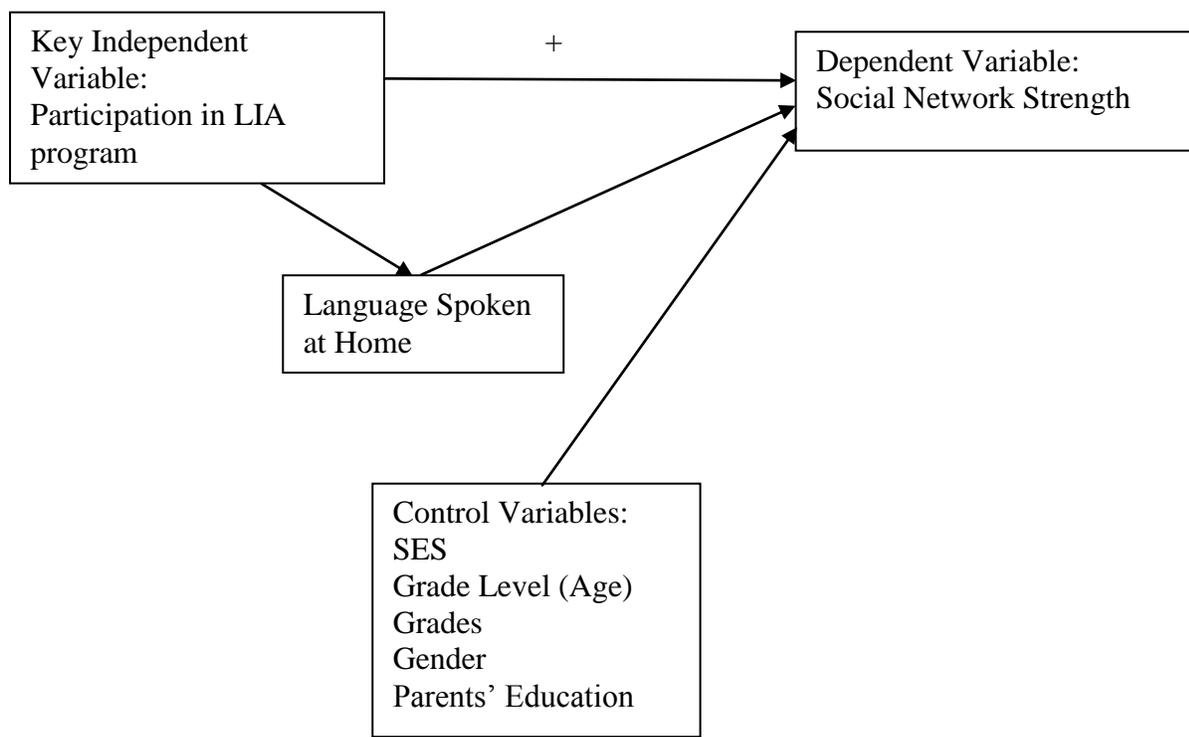


Figure 1. Model to compare social network strength (social domain; Model 1).

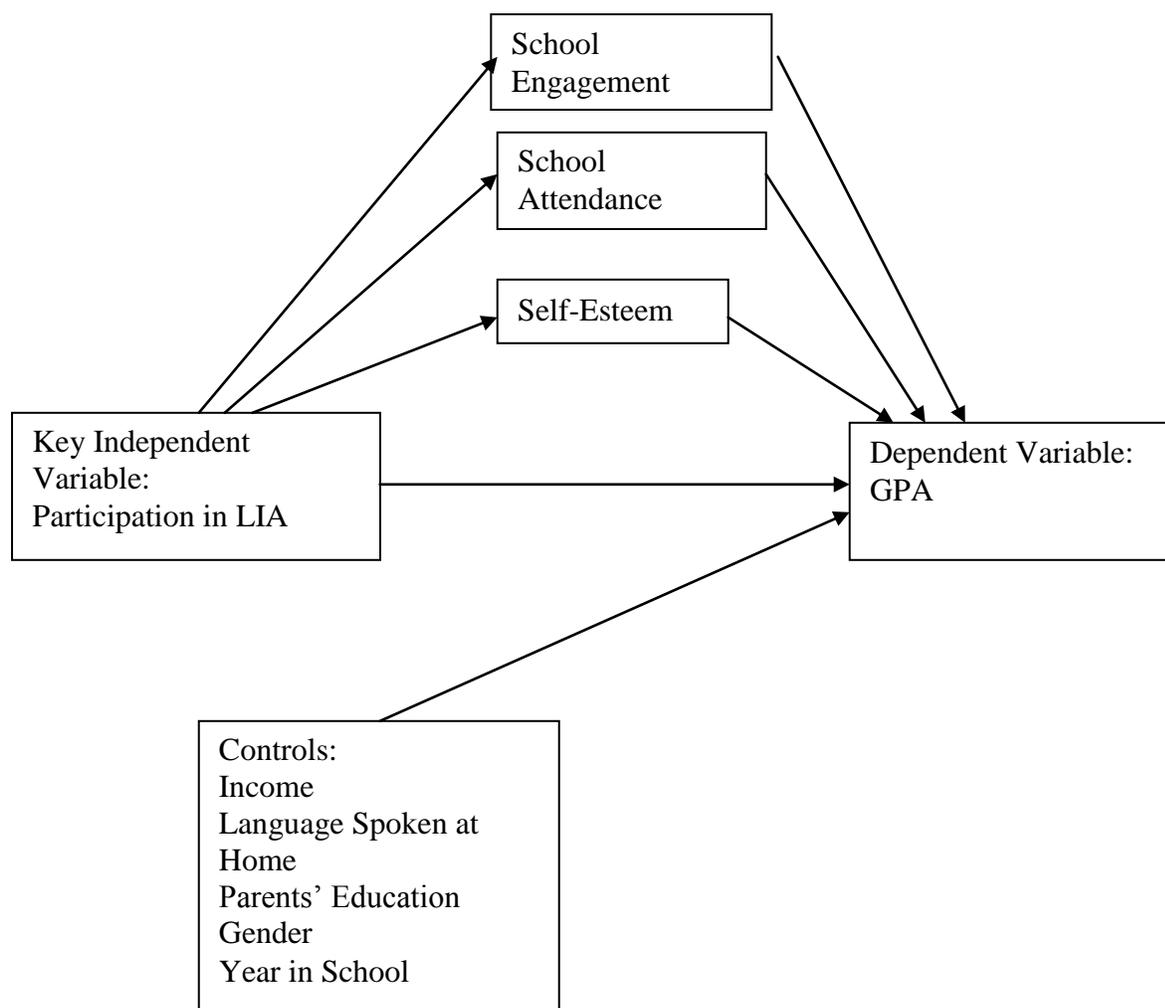


Figure 2. Model to compare academic achievement (cognitive domain; Model 2).

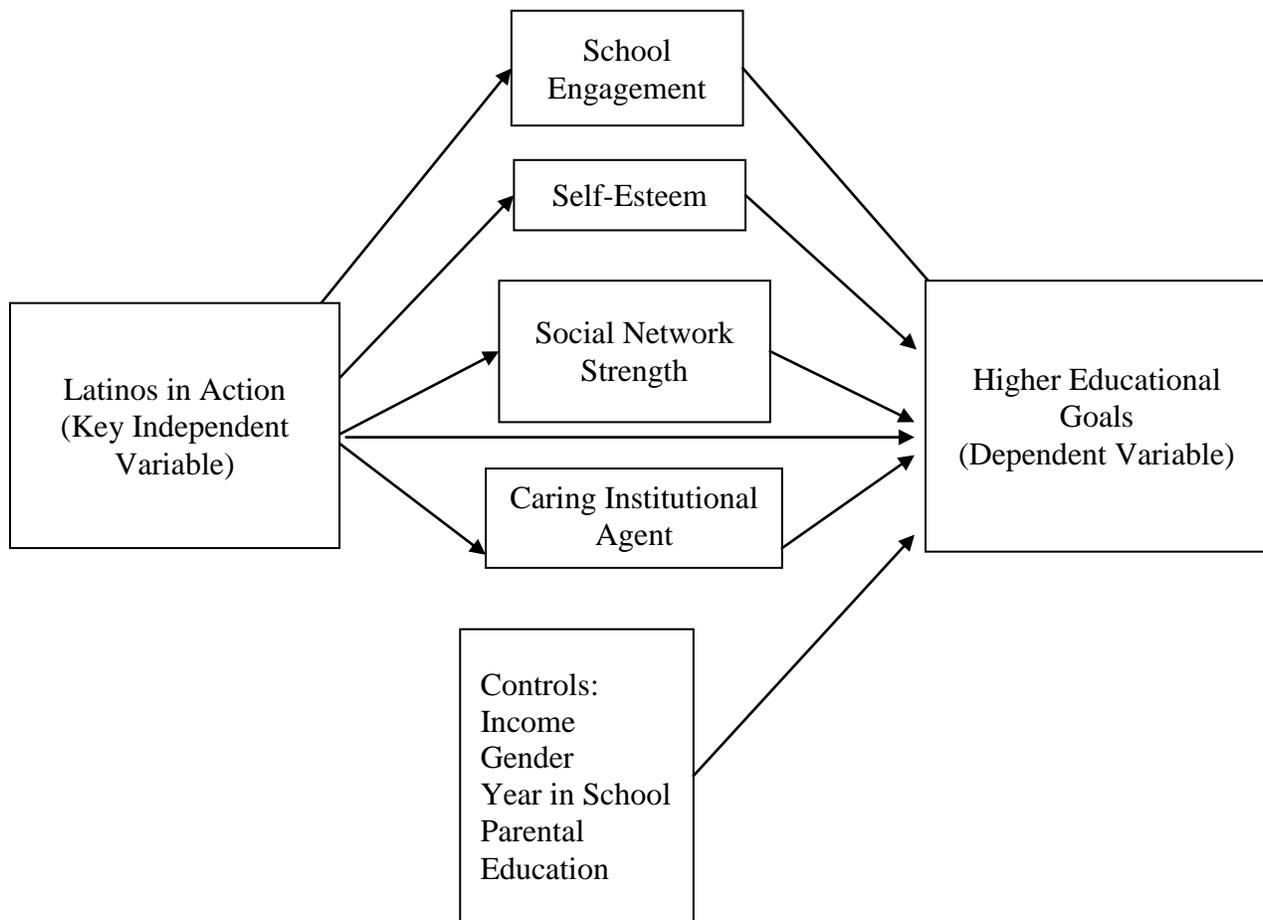


Figure 3. Model to compare highest education desired (cognitive domain; Model 3).

ARTICLE 2

Reflectivity and School Success: Writing as Intervention  
in the Latinos in Action Program

## Article 2 Abstract

The intervention Latinos in Action (LIA) seeks to increase high school completion and college graduation rates among emergent bilingual Latinos by involving them as paraprofessional literacy tutors for younger Spanish-speaking students. Critical to culture-specific intervention programs is a process through which students grow in self-awareness and self-efficacy as they build their social and cultural capital (Gibson, 1988; Bourdieu, 1985; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Lareau & Weininger, 2003; Ogbu, 1987; Portes, 1998; Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995; Weininger & Lareau, n.d.). To combat academic resistance, the intervention must help students simultaneously preserve their cultural heritage and find a place within the dominant culture (Conger & Galambos, 1997; Deyhle, 1986; Erickson, 1987; Giroux, 1983a, 1983b; Mayes, Cutri, Rogers, & Montero, 2006; Pottinger, 1989)—a task that requires a high level of reflective thought. This study explored journaling (Emig, 1977; Fulwiler, 1982) as a vehicle for self-reflection within LIA classes. A coding analysis of 200 LIA student journals demonstrated a high level of reflectivity across three emerging themes: satisfaction with the tutee's progress, growth in leadership and social skills, and increased drive for school success. Overall, 160 journal writers (80%) used language indicative of serious reflective thought. Implications for educators of minority students are discussed.

*Keywords:* emergent bilinguals, writing to learn, paraprofessional training, Latinos in higher education

## **Background**

As the American classroom has become more culturally heterogeneous over the past several decades, the need for educators to be aware of students' cultural processes and perspectives has grown. Of particular interest to public school administrators are the needs of Hispanic students.

### **Increase in Hispanic Population**

With 10 million Hispanic students in kindergarten through Grade 12 (Fry & Gonzales, 2008), Hispanics are the fastest-growing minority group in public schools. One nonpartisan research group, the Pew Hispanic Center, reported that the years 1990–2006 saw the number of Hispanic public school students nearly double, with 60% of new enrollments coming from Hispanic students (Fry & Gonzales, 2008). Fry and Gonzales (2008) estimated that in the U.S. in 1990 one in eight public school students was Hispanic, compared to one in five by 2008. Looking ahead, by 2050 the numbers of non-Hispanic school-age children are predicted to grow by 4%, while the numbers of Hispanic, non-white school-age children are predicted to grow by 166% (Fry & Gonzales, 2008). This is a trend that will probably continue to grow (Spring, 1996).

Similar trends are found within the state of Utah. The 2000 census data for the state of Utah shows that the Hispanic school-aged population in the state increased by 12% from 1990 to 2000, with a projected 100% increase by 2015. Indeed, some schools in the state already have a Hispanic enrollment that surpasses 50% (Morgan, Ashbaker, & Enriquez, 2004). Such rapid growth in the number of Hispanic students indicates that there is a need for an infrastructure to support these students (Morgan et al., 2004).

Other statistics point to the multifaceted nature of the demographic transformations that are already well underway in the U.S. and their implications for public schooling. For example, between 1950 and 1970, Asians and Mexicans accounted for only 23% of the immigration to the U.S. These same two groups represented 65% of the immigrants to the U.S. between 1980 and 1990. In the decade 2000 to 2010, the Hispanic population alone grew by 15.2 million, representing the majority of the total population increase in the U.S. (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). As of 2010, Hispanics were the largest ethnic minority in the U.S., comprising 16.3% of the population, and Blacks were the second largest minority at 12.6% ( U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). In 1966, Hispanics represented 4.6% of the U.S. population; however, by 2020 or 2030 they will make up as much as 20% of the population.

Of the 3 million students in American public schools today who have only limited English proficiency, 75% of those students speak Spanish as their primary language. Most of the others speak Vietnamese, Cantonese, Cambodian, and Filipino/Tagalog (Valencia, 1991).

### **Latino Achievement Gap**

Clearly, ethnicity is becoming a paramount factor in U.S. education. And it is also clear that American schools are generally not responding as well as they might to either the problems or potential advantages that this reality engenders. For instance, a survey of Latinos between the ages of 16 and 24 found that 21% dropped out of school in 2000, while the dropout rate among Caucasian students and also among African American students was less than half of this percentage (U.S Census Bureau, as cited in Villalba, Akos, Keeter, & Ames, 2007). Latinos in Utah are even more likely to drop out: In 2008, 18.3% of Latino students dropped out of school nationwide, while 26% of Utah's Latino students did the same (U.S. Census Bureau 2010). Among those who do stay in school, a much smaller percentage of Latinos than Whites sign up

for extracurricular activities (Ream & Rumberger, 2008) or for Advanced Placement courses in English, mathematics, and science nationwide (Llagas & Snyder, 2003).

**College enrollment.** Not surprisingly, these trends extend into the college arena. Ethnic minority students are vastly over-represented in low academic and vocational tracks but quite underrepresented in the higher, college-bound academic tracks (Ballantine, 1997). Rates of college enrollment in Utah in 2000 were the lowest for students who were Hispanic or Latino (13.4%) or Mexican (10.9%) (Perlich, 2006).

**Test scores.** Across the nation, Hispanics trail their White peers in test scores for both reading and math. The Institute of Education Sciences (n.d., b) found that reading scale scores for White, Hispanic, and Black 12th-grade students went up slightly between 2005 and 2009, with Hispanic students consistently scoring more than 20 points (on a scale of 500) lower than Whites, even when special accommodations for English language learners were in place. A similar pattern, with a much larger gap, was found for mathematics scores, with Hispanic students scoring 24 points (of 300) lower than White students in 2009 (Institute of Education Sciences, n.d., a).

In Utah, criterion-referenced tests that measure proficiency show a gap that is much, much larger. For 2005, 30% more White students than Latino students were proficient in language arts; 26% more White students were proficient in mathematics; and 37% more White students were proficient in science (Alemán & Rorrer, 2006, p. 21). The Utah State Office of Education reported that only 60% of Hispanic students who were slated to graduate from high school in 2007 passed the reading portion of the Utah Basic Skills Competency Test; only 44% passed the writing subtest; and just 37% passed the mathematics subtest. Demonstrating competence in all subtests is a requirement for earning a “basic” high school diploma in Utah

(rather than an “alternative completion diploma” or “certificate of completion”; Alemán & Rorrer, 2006, p. 23–24). Hispanics’ subtest scores for the class of 2007 trailed those of Whites, with gaps of 38% for reading, 33% for writing, and 35% in mathematics (Alemán & Rorrer, 2006, p. 26). The actual gap could even be larger: the data do not indicate how many Hispanic high school-age students were not tested at all (Alemán & Rorrer, 2006, p. 26).

### **Factors Contributing to Underachievement**

The many theories of minority student academic failure help to explain the cultural dilemmas and problems minority students face within the school system. Ranging from discussion of economic and political issues to the underlying challenges of social and cultural integration, the theories demonstrate that minority underachievement is a complex phenomenon.

**Economic and political inequalities.** Many Latinos in U.S. schools face poverty at home, along with food insecurity and housing instability. This uncertainty is compounded for students with undocumented immigration status, and for students whose loved ones have undocumented status. Research has long documented the consequences of poverty and hunger on academic success (Murphy, Pagano, et al., 1998; Murphy, Wehler, et al., 1998), as well as the disadvantages created by funding systems that result in less money to schools in poorer areas—the very schools whose students are often most at-risk (García, Kleifgen, & Falchi, 2008). Additionally, as demonstrated by Trevino (2011), students who believe they will not be able to work legally after obtaining their diploma or college degree may feel less motivation to work towards academic goals.

Another initial hindrance to Hispanic academic achievement is the number of Hispanic students for whom English is a second language. According to Lazarín (2006), 45% of Latino students can be classified as English language learners, meaning that Spanish is spoken in their

homes and, generally, that all family members who are over age 14 speak English “less than very well” (García et al., 2008). Across the United States, the number of English language learners (perhaps more accurately called “emergent bilinguals”) is increasing at a rate that is seven times faster than the rate of growth in total student enrollment (García et al., 2008). Up to 79% of these emergent bilinguals speak Spanish (García et al., 2008).

Although the students’ dual language ability will become a tremendous asset to their communities and to the economy in a globalized world (García et al., 2008), and even though the process of becoming bilingual results in demonstrable cognitive gains (Mayes, Cutri, Rogers, & Montero, 2006), students in the early phases of language acquisition will not learn concepts as readily or test as well as their native English-speaking peers. Without support, these emerging bilingual students may consider themselves to be slow learners and may decide early on that they are not suited for college.

**Social and cultural discontinuities.** Running just as deep for many Latino students, even those not facing poverty, language, or immigration issues, are struggles with cultural and social integration (Mayes et al, 2006; Ogbu, 1982). Several theories (Gibson, 1988; Bourdieu, 1985; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Lareau & Weininger, 2003; Ogbu, 1987; Portes, 1998; Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995; Weininger & Lareau, n.d.) describe how the education system in the U.S. rewards those whose cultural and socioeconomic background prep them to succeed from infancy; that is, Caucasian students from wealthy, educated households develop or inherit social and cultural capital that makes school success come easily. Minority students, on the other hand, sensing the system’s inherent favoritism and lacking the social and linguistic code employed in the classroom (Bernstein, 1964, 1977; Heath 1983/1994), may actually come to resist academic achievement in an effort to sustain their cultural identity (Conger &

Galambos, 1997; Deyhle, 1986; Erickson, 1987; Giroux, 1983a, 1983b; Mayes et al., 2006; Pottinger, 1989).

Schools, it appears, can feed students' resistance, through the cultural prejudices or misunderstandings of faculty and administrators, who act as institutional agents. Fordham and Ogbu wrote in 1986 that the "social interactions between institutional agents and minority youths are often characterized by social distance and distrust" (p. 78; see also Sanchez-Jankowski, 1991).

There is a need for multicultural education, a process, wherein students and school professionals learn from one another. The student needs time to learn and grow within the system and the system needs to learn more about the student and his or her cultural background. Missing from most schools is a vehicle that will allow ethnic minority students to grow, explore, and perform the essential functions needed to excel in the classroom. However, some schools in Utah are working to create such a vehicle through the Latinos in Action program (LIA).

### **Interventions Offered by Latinos in Action (LIA)**

Founded in 2001, Latinos in Action seeks to enhance the social, cognitive, and linguistic domains of Latino students by training them to mentor younger Latino peers. The repeatable elective course, tailored for junior high and high school students, is open to all students with GPAs of 2.0 or higher who speak some Spanish and some English. The intervention was designed to lower dropout rates and encourage higher education among this at-risk population by increasing students' school engagement and resources for building social and cultural capital. Specific program components center on service learning, cultural supports, and the opportunity for students to reflect on identity and goals through semi-structured journaling.

**Service learning.** The LIA teacher (or “advisor”) uses peer tutoring curriculum to prepare students to volunteer as paraprofessional literacy educators. Students then spend over 100 hours in local schools, where they translate for parents and tutor younger students, many of whom are emergent bilinguals, themselves. Like the paraprofessionals in Ashbaker and Morgan’s study (2012), LIA students use their language skills and mentoring influence to support at-risk younger students and their families.

**Cultural supports.** LIA students receive a variety of cultural supports. They attend presentations from prominent Latino business people and educators, and many participate in after-school opportunities to rehearse and perform cultural dances. Ideally a Latino, the program advisor is generally a teacher at the high school or junior high with a high level of cultural understanding, such as a Spanish teacher or an individual who has lived and studied abroad. Over time, the advisor becomes an important institutional agent for helping students access social networks (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Portes, 1998). The advisor recommends strategies to help students engage in their secondary schools and prepare for college. The advisor also assists, as needed, with college and financial aid applications.

**Journaling.** One program component that seems particularly meaningful to students is the opportunity to write about their experiences. Through guided journaling and open-ended writing assignments, students reflect on the cultural influences that shape them, and on the often-difficult process of adapting to life in the U.S. as English language learners. Students also write about their tutoring experiences and their feelings about their involvement in LIA. Generally written in a mix of English and Spanish, these writings poignantly chronicle students’ transformation as they come to embrace their background and learn to use their experiences to help others succeed.

In a review of research on the effects of journaling assignments for K-12 and college students, Stotsky (1995) concluded that personal writing alone has not been shown to produce great gains in writing skill. However, Emig (1977) pointed to the work of developmental psychologists to contend that writing is a unique and essential mode of learning. More specifically, Fulwiler (1982) documented that brief in-class journals in any discipline make the learning process active and make concepts personal (see also Simon, Hawley, & Britton, 1973). Like the journals studied by Fulwiler (1982), LIA journals serve as both “a record of evolving insight as well as the tool to gain that insight” (p. 25).

### **Initial Data in Support of LIA**

Since the program’s beginning, LIA has grown exponentially. It operated in 58 Utah schools for school year 2011–2012, as well as in a few schools in Washington State and Idaho. The program enrolled a total of 1375 students for the 2011–12 school year and has trained an estimated 4380 students as paraprofessional tutors since 2001. So far, every student enrolled in Latinos in Action has graduated from high school. In 2010, 85% of graduating LIA seniors went directly to college, almost all with full or partial scholarship aid. The nationwide outreach program AmeriCorps chose LIA for sponsorship beginning in 2008, helping to provide some funds for administration and growth. Additional support comes from the Utah State Office of Education, which provides literacy training manuals (through Student Tutoring Achievement for Reading, or STAR [2010], available at [schools.utah.gov](http://schools.utah.gov)).

### **Research Purpose**

LIA’s rapid growth and positive outcomes for Latino students make the program an important focus of study. As noted, a key task for ethnicity-specific intervention programs is helping students find their own place within the U.S. school system, such students embrace self-

efficacy and resilience, rather than resistance. With the academic influence of LIA already somewhat established, the present research focused on program components that help make that academic success a reality. We examined LIA student journals to discover what LIA participants identified as most influential or meaningful to their personal development and growing sense of self.

### **Method**

Researchers brought an emic approach (Pike, 1993; Lett, 1990; Morris, Leung, Ames, & Lickel, 1999) to coding the student writing in an attempt to describe experiences through participants' own words. Because a study of Latinos in Action bridges two important fields (namely, education and culture), it was essential that research processes reflect cultural sensitivity.

### **Data Source**

One to two classes of LIA students, each including 20–40 students in grades 10–12, were selected from each of five suburban high schools in Utah. A total of 200 journals were collected from the schools' LIA advisors after the conclusion of the 2010–11 school year.

At the beginning of the year, students write in their journals during class time two to three times a week. Some entries are prompted; others are opportunities for students to write about whatever they wish. By the third month of LIA, students are working in elementary school classrooms four out of five class periods, and their required in-class journaling drops to once every-other week. Journal entries are typically unedited and free-flowing and are handwritten. Most entries allow students to describe what they are learning and why, as well as how they feel about their learning experiences. For the purpose of this study we chose three journal prompts

that seemed to spark the most rich and interactive responses in the initial reading and coding, as follows: (a) “Provide an example of a success you’ve had as an LIA tutor;” (b) “What has LIA done for you as an individual?” and (c) “How has LIA helped you to move forward as a student in high school and help you create a plan beyond high school?”

Students are told at the beginning of the year that their journals and other writing assignments will be graded for effort and completion, but not for grammar or style. Students are invited to write in Spanish, English, or a blend of their languages, whichever they prefer.

### **Data Analysis**

Journals were coded using methodology described by Strauss and Corbin in 1994. Open coding, or identifying ideas and meanings, was followed by axial coding, in which the ideas were grouped into thematic nodes. Then selective coding was used to organize the groupings into one broad theme.

## **Results**

The 200 journals revealed 27 open codes, ranging from positive comments about interaction with the tutee (mentioned 150 times) to the journal writer’s improvement on the ACT (mentioned 10 times) (see Table 2). The top emerging themes were grouped into three main axial codes: (a) satisfaction with progress of tutee (mentioned by 75% of writers); (b) growth in leadership (mentioned by 70%) and social skills (60%); and (c) increased drive for school success (57%) (see Table 3).

### **Satisfaction with Progress of Tutee**

Of the 200 LIA students, 150 expressed satisfaction with gains made by the student(s) they tutored. This included statements of admiration for the younger student. Comments about

tutees were almost always positive, expressing feelings of joy in seeing progress during tutoring sessions. One 10th-grade female student wrote:

A success for me as an LIA tutor is seeing how people succeed after they are given a helping hand! It's like when you don't know what to do and you're lost and all of a sudden someone's there. I love that feeling with my students, and how they would greet me!

Writers also said they were glad to be prepared to help the tutee progress or in being taught the skills to help with their progress. A ninth-grade male student attributed his progress as a tutor to the LIA curriculum: "It made me be able to tutor students without worrying much 'cause before I was thinking how am I supposed to teach this little kid you know."

### **Growth in Leadership and Social Skills**

This axial code took in statements about the growth of writers' leadership within LIA (mentioned by 140 of 200 writers) and statements about new social skills (mentioned by 120). These figures indicated that the majority of this LIA student sample felt that they had increased in their leadership ability and social skills—important indicators of increasing social capital. Many writers used the words *role model* within the same paragraphs. These entries reflected the belief that mentoring their younger peers through service and literacy gave them, as tutors, a boost in confidence in their own ability to teach and lead. A 12th-grade male student wrote that LIA "helped to be more expressive and social. Got me out of my shell because it encouraged me to do something I like."

Writers simultaneously expressed a sense a pride for their culture along with a joy in serving others and caring about those who struggled. A 12th-grade student said her experiences in LIA "helped me to understand that we all need to help each other improve us Latinos."

The students also hinted at an increase in linguistic competency, being able to express themselves better with others. An 11th-grade student grouped her improved communication abilities with two other LIA-related changes: “It has taught me how much the ‘at home life’ affects things you do or dreams you are allowed to have. It has also taught me that working with someone younger can help you succeed yourself. I know how to better express myself in two languages to people also.”

### **Increased Drive for School Success**

A combination of two emerging themes, the axial code involving new academic aspirations included statements about being more responsible and accountable (mentioned by 40% of writers; 80 of 200) and statements about writers’ own improved academic performance (17.5%; 35 of 200). Together, these emerging themes reached a combined rate of 57%. Many writers cited that having a plan and being prepared helped them academically. A 10th-grade female student shared: “Well, I kind of knew what I wanted to do, but LIA encouraged me to actually investigate my career & see if I liked it or not. With LIA I also received a lot of scholarship and financial aid information.”

Students also wrote about the gains they had made in their grades, in their ACT scores, and general academics. A ninth-grade male student articulated his goal to “begin working in my school and try harder and get better grades.”

Also cited by LIA journal writers was the openness they had learned, including tolerance and gratitude for others. A 12th-grade student credited his work as a tutor with increasing his appreciation for his own teachers: “You realize how hard teachers work to help students in school; and the kids I helped improved their reading, math and writing skills and became more enthusiastic with learning.” An 11th-grade female student found a new ability to recognize

others' needs: "It has taught me to be patient and pay attention to the different needs of the students. It helped me become a better person and I learned to love the kids I tutored."

### **Reflectivity**

The overarching selective code, titled "reflectivity," was a measure of how many journal writers used expressions like "I think," or "I would like to change," or "in the future I hope to," or "now I feel." Eighty percent of journal writers (160) used reflective expressions, which are grouped by topic in Table 4.

### **Discussion**

That journal writing provided a mechanism for thinking about thinking was not surprising. Fulwiler (1982) asserted that language such as "I agreed" or "I guess" or "it seems" show "the writer testing prior assumptions" in meaningful ways (p. 21). Such metacognition is helpful for professionals and paraeducators in general (Robins, Ashbaker, Enriquez, & Morgan, 2003), but may be of particular value for students confronting a variety of cultural prejudices and an array of longstanding, limiting beliefs about themselves and their academic potential.

An interesting finding was that reflectivity varied by school. Students in two of the LIA classes wrote journal entries of moderate length (at least half a page) with frequent reflective statements. Students in the third class wrote very short entries with less evidence of reflective thinking. They seemed to be rushing through their entries as a formality, rather than an opportunity to document or discover. By contrast, students in the fourth class wrote entries that were much longer (up to two or three pages). These students not only provided richer data, they also showed a greater ability to think in-depth about their experiences and goals. Interestingly, the teacher of this class wrote comments to the students in the margins of their journals,

responding to their thought processes and observations. The other teachers in the study indicated they had read the journals by placing a check mark in the margins.

### **Limitations**

Data was harder to collect from the school with the shorter entries. Handwriting was sometimes impossible to decipher, and students tended to write similar comments in each entry.

Responder bias could have been an important concern. Because the students knew their writing was going to be read, they may have responded to prompts with answers they hoped would please their teacher. When similar students in the same class used similar language to express their thoughts, the researcher suspected that the ideas may have originated from the teacher, rather than from the students. It can be argued, though, that in the process of writing and reflecting, the students have internalized the teacher's encouraging ideas and made them their own (Fulwiler, 1982).

One 10th-grade student complained that she would have written more personal things if this were a private journal:

I know you asked me to write more in my journal entries and I don't mind but sometimes I don't have anything in my mind that I want to put on paper sometimes. I think better that way when I'm alone in my room at home listening to my music. I have this little book I write in but those are just *chismes* [gossip] and private stuff like that.

Although concerns about public disclosure could have limited some responses, many of the students probably wrote more in their journal for LIA, and more reflectively, than they would likely have written without being prompted and assigned.

## **Future Studies**

Duplication of this study involving more participants and an outside research team is recommended. Additional studies could investigate the reflective experiences of other groups participating LIA, such as tutees, teachers, and parents, to gain a better understanding of how the program influences the thinking of a broader educational community. Interviews could investigate the tutee's feelings about their interactions with the tutors and the change in their feelings about school. Similarly, interviews with the elementary teachers involved or with parents of LIA students could document changes in attitudes and expectations.

## **Implications for Educators**

Journals provide a window into students' minds and experiences and into classroom dynamics. Teacher attitude and the atmosphere of the group come through strongly in students' writing. Particularly for Latino students, who often receive little school-related mentoring at home, it is critical to have a teacher who is upbeat and engages with them in their rethinking of personal limitations and goals. Teachers who engage with students' writing by offering comments in the margins of journals and assignments can elicit even more reflective thought. Indeed, the reflectivity inherent in journaling may be one of the most important components of Latinos in Action. To that end, classroom instructors, as institutional agents, must create a balanced classroom environment that favors writing to learn as well as social growth.

## **Conclusion**

Adapting to the U.S. educational system can be a daunting task for Latino students. Economic and political inequalities, along with social and cultural discontinuities, prompt some students to choose academic resistance as an attempt to maintain their cultural identity. Intervention programs aimed at increasing Latino school success—at the secondary and post-

secondary levels—must find ways to help students envision academic achievement as possible, desirable, and congruent with their cultural identity. The high level of reflective thought required in this process can be facilitated, in part, by classroom discussions and journaling.

A coding analysis of 200 journals written by students in the intervention program *Latinos in Action* revealed that 80% of journal writers (160) used self-reflective expressions. In particular, journal writers mentioned three main themes: satisfaction with the tutee's progress, growth in leadership and social skills, and increased drive for school success.

The benefits of writing to learn have been long recognized by educators. Less well studied are the benefits of self-reflective journaling as part of cultural and academic intervention programs. This study provides initial evidence that guided classroom writing, carefully read and responded to by institutional agents, facilitated increased self-understanding, leading to higher academic aspirations, among high school students involved in the intervention *Latinos in Action*.

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Table 2

*Open Coding Themes by Frequency and Rate*

Open code	Students mentioning ( <i>N</i> = 200)	% of students mentioning*
Enjoyed growth and success of tutee	150	75
Leadership	140	70
Increase in social skills	120	60
Becoming more open-minded, tolerant	100	50
Role model (being or appreciating)	100	50
Becoming more responsible, accountable	80	40
LIA opened more doors	60	30
Academic improvement	35	18
Educational awareness	29	15
How others feel; remember how it felt	28	14
Prepared for outside world	26	13
Confidence in own teaching skills	24	12
Intro to networks	23	12
Reality about careers	23	12
Show community who we really are	22	11
Care more	22	11
LIA opened eyes; awareness	21	11
Little steps of progress	21	11
Happy to serve	20	10
Selfless leadership, patience	20	10
Realization	20	10
Have a plan	15	8
Productive	15	8
Outside world prep	14	7
People do care	14	7
Better performance on ACT exam	10	5

\* Values rounded to the nearest 1%

Table 3

*Axial Codes with Open Code Grouping*

Axial code Open code(s) or phrases	Students mentioning ( <i>N</i> = 200)	% of students mentioning
Enjoyed growth and success of tutee	150	75.0
Love to see their progress from the beginning	80	40.0
Enjoyed their learning and growth	40	20.0
Appreciated the literacy tools, training from LIA	30	15.0
Growth in leadership and social skills*	140 & 120	70.0 & 60.0
I have grown a lot; grown as a leader through patience, serving community	80	40.0
Happy to serve	25	12.5
Care more about academics; being a role model	15	7.5
Confidence in teaching; ability to speak without fear	85	42.5
Pride in Latino heritage; show community who we are	55	27.5
Increased drive for school success*	80 & 35	40.0 & 17.5
Little steps to make academic progress	15	7.5
Have a plan for future	35	17.5
More open-minded and tolerant (open to others and to school)	30	15.0
ACT exam scores better; increased vocabulary; better grades; university acceptance more likely	35	17.5

\* Total number of individual students mentioning this axial code was not calculated independently of those mentioning one or more of the contributing open codes; thus, no composite number or percentage is given.

Table 4

*Selective Code with Major Themes*

SELECTIVE CODE Axial and open code(s) or phrases	Students mentioning ( <i>N</i> = 200)	% of students mentioning
REFLECTIVITY	160	80.0
How are things going with my tutee? Noting feelings about progress or enjoying working with tutee; wondering if tutors could do more	60	30.0
How others feel Student's effect on tutee and peers; often tied to specific occasions	30	15.0
Am I headed in the right direction? What do I want? Am I on the right track to meet my goals?	25	12.5
Remember how they felt Reflecting back to own elementary experiences as an ELL; expressions of empathy	20	10.0
Are we prepared for outside world? Thinking about preparation for future and whether it will be sufficient	13	6.5
Reality about careers Thinking about future and new possibilities for their training	12	6.0

APPENDIX A:  
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

As the American classroom has become more culturally heterogeneous over the past several decades, the need for educators to be aware of students' cultural processes and perspectives has grown. Of particular interest to public school administrators are the needs of Hispanic students.

**Growth of Hispanic Population**

With 10 million Hispanic students in kindergarten through Grade 12 (Fry & Gonzales, 2008), Hispanics are the fastest-growing minority group in public schools. One nonpartisan research group, the Pew Hispanic Center, reported that the years 1990–2006 saw the number of Hispanic public school students nearly double, with 60% of new enrollments coming from Hispanic students (Fry & Gonzales, 2008). Fry and Gonzales (2008) estimated that in the U.S. in 1990 one in eight public school students was Hispanic, compared to one in five by 2008. Looking ahead, by 2050 the numbers of non-Hispanic school-age children are predicted to grow by 4%, while the numbers of Hispanic, non-white school-age children are predicted to grow by 166% (Fry & Gonzales, 2008). This is a trend that will probably continue to grow (Spring, 1996).

Similar trends are found within the state of Utah. The 2000 census data for the state of Utah shows that the Hispanic school-aged population in the state increased by 12% from 1990 to 2000, with a projected 100% increase by 2015. Indeed, some schools in the state already have a Hispanic enrollment that surpasses 50% (Morgan, Ashbaker, & Enriquez, 2004). Such rapid

growth in the number of Hispanic students indicates that there is a need for an infrastructure to support these students (Morgan et al., 2004).

Other statistics point to the multifaceted nature of the demographic transformations that are already well underway in the U.S. and their implications for public schooling. For example, between 1950 and 1970, Asians and Mexicans accounted for only 23% of the immigration to the U.S. These same two groups represented 65% of the immigrants to the U.S. between 1980 and 1990. In the decade 2000 to 2010, the Hispanic population alone grew by 15.2 million, representing the majority of the total population increase in the U.S. (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). As of 2010, Hispanics were the largest ethnic minority in the U.S., comprising 16.3% of the population, and Blacks were the second largest minority at 12.6% ( U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). In 1966, Hispanics represented 4.6% of the U.S. population; however, by 2020 or 2030 they will make up as much as 20% of the population.

Of the 3 million students in American public schools today who have only limited English proficiency, 75% of those students speak Spanish as their primary language. Most of the others speak Vietnamese, Cantonese, Cambodian, and Filipino/Tagalog (Valencia, 1991).

### **Latino Achievement Gap**

Clearly, ethnicity is becoming a paramount factor in U.S. education. And it is also clear that American schools are generally not responding as well as they might to either the problems or potential advantages that this reality engenders. For instance, a survey of Latinos between the ages of 16 and 24 found that 21% dropped out of school in 2000, while the dropout rate among Caucasian students and also among African American students was less than half of this percentage (U.S Census Bureau, as cited in Villalba, Akos, Keeter, & Ames, 2007). Latinos in Utah are even more likely to drop out: In 2008, 18.3% of Latino students dropped out of school

nationwide, while 26% of Utah's Latino students did the same (U.S. Census Bureau 2010). Moreover, among those who do stay in school, ethnic minority students are vastly over-represented in low academic and vocational tracks but quite underrepresented in the higher, college-bound academic tracks (Ballantine, 1997). Not surprisingly, rates of college enrollment in Utah in 2000 were the lowest for students who were Hispanic or Latino (13.4%) or Mexican (10.9%) (Perlich, 2006).

**Test scores.** Across the nation, Hispanics trail their White peers in test scores for both reading and math. The Institute of Education Sciences (n.d., b) found that reading scale scores for White, Hispanic, and Black 12th-grade students went up slightly between 2005 and 2009, with Hispanic students consistently scoring more than 20 points (on a scale of 500) lower than Whites, even when special accommodations for English language learners were in place. A similar pattern, with a much larger gap, was found for mathematics scores, with Hispanic students scoring 24 points (of 300) lower than White students in 2009 (Institute of Education Sciences, n.d., a).

In Utah, criterion-referenced tests that measure proficiency show a gap that is much, much larger. For 2005, 30% more White students than Latino students were proficient in language arts; 26% more White students were proficient in mathematics; and 37% more White students were proficient in science (Alemán & Rorrer, 2006, p. 21). The Utah State Office of Education reported that only 60% of Hispanic students who were slated to graduate from high school in 2007 passed the reading portion of the Utah Basic Skills Competency Test; only 44% passed the writing subtest; and just 37% passed the mathematics subtest. Demonstrating competence in all subtests is a requirement for earning a "basic" high school diploma in Utah (rather than an "alternative completion diploma" or "certificate of completion"; Alemán &

Rorrer, 2006, p. 23–24). Hispanics' subtest scores for the class of 2007 trailed those of Whites, with gaps of 38% for reading, 33% for writing, and 35% in mathematics (Alemán & Rorrer, 2006, p. 26). The actual gap could even be larger: the data do not indicate how many Hispanic high school-age students were not tested at all (Alemán & Rorrer, 2006, p. 26).

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 requires that a schools' measure of adequate yearly progress be broken down by category, with separate designations for students with learning disabilities, students from low-income families, and students who are of Hispanic origin (Commission on No Child Left Behind, 2007). Although serious concerns about both the accuracy of the measurement and the efficacy of its sanctions exist (Balfanz, Legters, West, & Weber, 2007), the separate achievement category for Hispanic students is another indicator of the recognized achievement gap.

**School engagement.** Another area where Latino students lag behind is in school engagement, a measure of students' involvement in formal and informal school-related activities. School engagement has been often cited (e.g., Carini, Kuh, & Klein, 2006; Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004) as a predictor of secondary and post-high school academic success. Ream & Rumberger (2008) examined the relationship between school engagement and friendship networks for Mexican American students and their White, non-Latino peers and found that, by comparison, the Mexican American students were “less engaged in unorganized academic endeavors and formally sponsored extracurricular activities” (p. 109). This led the Mexican American students to associate more readily with peers who were not academically minded, a phenomenon linked to dropping out.

Linked to school engagement and academic goals is the number of Hispanic students who register for advanced coursework in high school. Except for foreign language Advanced

Placement classes, which enroll double the rate of Latinos than Whites, a much smaller percentage of Latinos than Whites sign up for Advanced Placement courses in English, mathematics, and science nationwide (Llagas & Snyder, 2003).

Not surprisingly, this trend extends into the college arena. For 2005–06, Latino students made up 12% of the elementary and secondary student population in Utah, but only 3.4% of the enrollment at institutions of higher education (Alemán & Rorrer, 2006, p. 31). When Latino students do enroll for college, wrote Villalpando (2006), they “are not only concentrated in institutions considered to be of lesser prestige and with fewer resources, such as the community colleges, but can expect to attain lower levels of academic achievement—and social mobility—as a result of attending these types of institutions” (p. 39; quoted in Alemán & Rorrer, p. 32).

This literature review will synthesize scholarly perspectives on the achievement gap and why it persists, including cultural and economic factors. The review will also explain how those factors are being addressed in the state of Utah through an intervention for Latino students, the Latinos in Action program.

### **Factors Contributing to Underachievement**

The many theories of minority student academic failure help to explain the cultural dilemmas and problems minority students face within the school system. Ranging from discussion of economic and political issues to the underlying challenges of social and cultural integration, the theories demonstrate that minority underachievement is a complex phenomenon.

**Economic and political inequalities.** Many Latinos in U.S. schools face poverty at home, along with food insecurity and housing instability. This uncertainty is compounded for students with undocumented immigration status, and for students whose loved ones have undocumented status. Research has long documented the consequences of poverty and hunger

on academic success (Murphy et al., 1998a, 1998b), as well as the disadvantages created by funding systems that result in less money to schools in poorer areas—the very schools whose students are often most at-risk (García, Kleifgen, & Falchi, 2008). Additionally, as demonstrated by Trevino (2011), students who believe they will not be able to work legally after obtaining their diploma or college degree may feel less motivation to work towards academic goals.

Another initial hindrance to Hispanic academic achievement is the number of Hispanic students for whom English is a second language. According to Lazarín (2006), 45% of Latino students can be classified as English language learners, meaning that Spanish is spoken in their homes and, generally, that all family members who are over age 14 speak English “less than very well” (García, Kleifgen, & Falchi, 2008). Across the United States, the number of English language learners (perhaps more accurately called “emergent bilinguals”) is increasing at a rate that is seven times faster than the rate of growth in total student enrollment (García, Kleifgen, & Falchi, 2008). Up to 79% of these emergent bilinguals speak Spanish (García, Kleifgen, & Falchi, 2008).

Although the students’ dual language ability will become a tremendous asset to their communities and to the economy in a globalized world (García, Kleifgen, & Falchi, 2008), and even though the process of becoming bilingual results in demonstrable cognitive gains (Mayes, Cutri, Rogers, & Montero, 2006), students in the early phases of language acquisition will not learn concepts as readily or test as well as their native English-speaking peers. Without support, these emerging bilingual students may consider themselves to be slow learners and may decide early on that they are not suited for college.

**Difficulties in social and cultural integration.** Running just as deep for many Latino students, even those not facing poverty, language, or immigration issues, are struggles with

cultural and social integration. Several theories describe how the education system in the U.S. rewards those whose cultural and socioeconomic background prep them to succeed from infancy; that is, Caucasian students from wealthy, educated households develop or inherit social and cultural capital that makes school success come easily. Minority students, on the other hand, sensing the system's inherent favoritism and lacking the social and linguistic code employed in the classroom, may actually come to resist academic achievement in an effort to sustain their cultural identity. Several prominent theories are described below.

***Structural inequality.*** Ogbu, an educational anthropologist, theorized in 1987 that serious differences between the student's culture and the dominant culture of a classroom can contribute to educational failure. In his structural inequality hypothesis, Ogbu posited that in order to understand differential academic performance among different minority groups, researchers must distinguish between the two types of minority groups in the United States: "immigrant minorities" and "caste-like minorities."

Like the Punjabis in Gibson's (1988) study of Hindu students in a Central California high school, immigrant minorities, having recently arrived in America, maintain a positive and coherent view of their own culture as well as an optimistic perception of the American labor market. Hence, they are motivated to succeed in school. Caste-like minorities, on the other hand, such as African Americans, who were born in the United States and whose ancestors have been victims of many generations of systemic discrimination, may have a damaged view of themselves culturally and they typically are pessimistic about the labor market. Hence, they feel they have little reason to succeed in school.

Thus, according to Ogbu (1987), minority academic success is largely a function of how intact a student's culture is and how optimistic he is about finding good work after finishing a

degree. For these reasons, some minorities tend to do well in school while others tend to do poorly. Ultimately, then, students' views of themselves and the opportunities available to them may greatly influence their performance.

***Literacy, interpretive communities, and sociolinguistic codes.*** Complicating the structural inequality hypothesis, each student comes to the classroom from a particular interpretive community, or group, with its own set of cultural assumptions. Each interpretive community has its own sociolinguistic code (Bernstein, 1977). Hence, one focus of discourse analysis has been on how a minority student's interpretive code may differ from the received code in the classroom. Bernstein (1964) explained the consequences of the backgrounds students bring to school. For example, children who learn a more elaborate linguistic code at home come to school much more ready to succeed than children who have learned a restricted code.

Heath (1983/1994) described literacy as more than a decontextualized collection of skills; literacy is ultimately a way of "knowing" (p. 81). She suggested that a person, as a literate being, develops an identity that is interwoven with his general perception of himself and his place in the world. Grounded in students' own perceptions of themselves and their world, the structural inequality hypothesis attributes a wide variety of academic problems to a bad fit between a student's culture and the classroom culture.

***Cultural discontinuity.*** Like the structural inequality hypothesis, the cultural discontinuity hypothesis attributes a variety of academic problems to a poor fit between students' culture and the dominant culture of the school. Theoretically, better outcomes result when there is a high degree of continuity between the teacher's and student's view of the student's role. A high degree of discontinuity can cause problems. For example, the student's behavior may be misinterpreted by the teacher as cognitive deficiency or lack of respect, whereas, in fact, it is

simply a matter of cultural difference (Mayes et al., 2006). Especially in the absence of formal culture training for teachers, an educational process is needed in which students and teachers can learn from each other about culture and expectations.

Ogbu (1982) defined three types of discontinuities: universal, primary, and secondary. He linked each with a distinct type of school problem, as described below.

Universal discontinuity deals with the ways school structure differs from family and community structure. While family learning tends to be informal, learning at school requires children to use different language and strategies (Ogbu, 1982). This more formal education helps “to prepare children in the social-emotional skills essential for participation in the adult work force of a modern industrial and cash economy” (Ogbu, 1982, p. 292). Specifically, Ogbu wrote that the formality of the classroom and grading system “tend to promote attributes of impersonality, specificity, universal standards, achievement norms, and independence similar to those valued and rewarded in the workplace of the corporate economy” (Ogbu, 1982, p. 292). Although students entering school for the first time may experience discomfort because of these differing systems, the universal discontinuity between school and family life can be beneficial to students as they prepare for careers. Ideally, “in school every child acquires new strategies for language use, learns out of context, and learns how to learn” (Ogbu, 1982, p. 292).

Primary discontinuity deals with differences among systems of formal education (Ogbu, 1982). Immigrant children who attended school in their home countries may experience primary discontinuity as they adapt to different ways of learning in the United States.

By contrast, secondary cultural discontinuity happens when different cultures meet within the same school system—particularly when that system is controlled by one cultural group (Ogbu, 1982). These “secondary cultural differences,” according to Ogbu (1982), “usually

develop as a response to a contact situation, especially a contact situation involving stratified domination” (p. 298). Secondary cultural discontinuity is the type most experienced by Latino students in the U.S.

Particularly influenced by cultural domination are members of caste-like minorities. Ogbu included Blacks, Native Americans, Chicanos (U.S. citizens of Mexican descent), and Puerto Ricans in his list of caste-like minorities in the U.S., defining them by the following characteristics: the groups are incorporated into society permanently and involuntarily (not by voluntary immigration); the groups experience limits on their upward mobility in terms of careers and status; and the groups tend to blame their social or economic problems on discrimination against them.

Arguably, not all Latinos fit in Ogbu’s caste-like definition. Differences in immigration patterns, country of origin, and length of time a student’s family has lived in the U.S. all influence students’ and teachers’ perceptions of minority status. However, as a whole, the Latino community has a long history in the United States and, as Ogbu suggested, experiences a high degree of secondary cultural discontinuity, within the school system and without.

***Limited cultural capital.*** In the early 1960s, Bourdieu sought to explain the disparities in the educational attainment of children from different social classes. He advanced the idea that, even more than economic factors, “cultural habits and . . . dispositions inherited” from students’ families are important for school success (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1964/1979, cited in Weininger & Lareau, n.d., p. 1).

Called “cultural capital,” Bourdieu’s view changed the way sociologists thought about culture. No longer was culture just a means of expression or shared values; it was a driving force in economics and education. For example, in the words of Weininger and Lareau (n.d.),

Bourdieu asserted that “cultural habits and dispositions comprise a resource capable of generating profits; they are potentially subject to monopolization by individuals and groups; and, under appropriate conditions, they can be transmitted from one generation to the next” (p. 1; see also Lareau & Weininger, 2003).

Cultural capital can exist in an “embodied” form, such as within a person who has gained a valuable competency through training or experience (Weininger & Lareau, n.d.). It can also exist in an “institutionalized” form. For example, a school that awards degrees to individuals with certain training or experience gives their embodied cultural capital an “objective value” (Weininger & Lareau, n.d., p. 1). In a sense, individuals with the same degree become “interchangeable,” in a way that is similar to the way money (or economic capital) is exchanged (Weininger & Lareau, n.d., p. 2).

Although cultural capital begins to accrue in the home, such as when parents speak to their babies, it is likely “to be perceived as inborn ‘talent,’ and its holder as ‘gifted.’” (Weininger & Lareau, n.d., p. 2). In turn, teachers attribute scholastic achievement to students’ effort, Weininger and Lareau (n.d.) explained Bourdieu’s theory that the meritocracy favored in schools maintains the privilege of the dominant classes:

The educational systems of modern societies tend to channel individuals towards class destinations that largely mirror their class origins. Moreover, they tend to elicit acceptance of this outcome (i.e., legitimization), both from those who are most privileged by it and those who are disfavored by it (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1970/1977). (pp. 1–2)

Thus, for Bourdieu, success in the educational system is largely dictated by the extent to which individuals have absorbed the dominant culture, or how much cultural capital they have,

with cultural capital defined as the general cultural background, knowledge, disposition, and skills that are passed from one generation to the next.

*Limited social capital.* Alongside the idea of cultural capital, Bourdieu produced the first systematic contemporary analysis of social capital, or the value of relationships. Bourdieu measured social capital as “the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition” (Bourdieu, 1985, p. 248).

Bourdieu proposed that the successful development of supportive and profitable relationships with institutional agents (e.g., teachers, counselors, and administrators) is closely related to students’ social consciousness, meaning those aspects of personality shared with significant others and community members within the opportunity structure (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). Of course, developing such relationships takes work. Portes (1998) cautioned that “social networks are not a natural given and must be constructed through investment strategies oriented to the institutionalization of group relations, usable as a reliable source of other benefits” (p.16).

For students, the benefits of social capital include the delivery of knowledge-based resources, for example, guidance for college admission or job advancement (Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995, p. 119). Bourdieu maintained that people intentionally build their relationships for the benefits that they would bring later (1985). Portes (1998) summarized Bourdieu’s key insight as follows:

Forms of capital are fungible, that is, they can be traded for each other and actually require such trades for their development. Social capital of any significance can seldom be acquired, for example, without the investment of some

material resources and the possession of some cultural knowledge, enabling the individual to establish relations with others. Social capital became defined as (1) a source of social control, (2) a source of family-mediated benefits, and (3) a source of resources mediated by nonfamily networks. (p. 35)

In Portes's (1998) view, social capital should consist of nonfamily networks, such as those that help individuals access jobs or loans, while cultural capital should be limited to exchanges and influences that happen within the family. "What families do, above all," Portes (1998) argued, "is to facilitate children's access to education and transmit a set of values and outlooks, variously classified as 'low-' to 'high-brow' culture" (p.10).

*Academic resistance.* Another conceptual framework to explain academic failure among cultural minorities has to do with students' own resistance to the dominant culture (Giroux 1983a, 1983b). According to resistance theory, a variety of sources within the educational arena may indict minority cultures (Erickson, 1987; Pottinger, 1989). For instance, predominant pedagogical styles, the curriculum of the school, the behavioral expectations, and the personal prejudices of school personnel (among other factors) often convey overt and covert messages that devalue the culture, heritage, and identity of minority students. Resistance theory asserts that during the educational endeavor, minority individuals actively resist and reject the implicit and explicit messages attacking their ethnic identity (Erickson, 1987). Under such conditions, educational achievement falters.

Specifically, resistance theory contends that minority students are not passive social actors in this drama. Particularly when pressured by their peers, these students actively work to protect their ethnic identity (Conger & Galambos, 1997; Deyhle, 1986; Mayes et al., 2006).

Resistance, in this sense, is a means of coping with a subordinated social position as well as preserving a distinct social identity (Ogbu, 1987).

Schools, it appears, can feed students' resistance, through the cultural prejudices or misunderstandings of faculty and administrators, who act as institutional agents. Fordham and Ogbu wrote in 1986 that the "social interactions between institutional agents and minority youths are often characterized by social distance and distrust" (p. 78; see also Sanchez-Jankowski, 1991).

Perhaps the most influential of these institutional agents is the classroom teacher. Mayes et al. (2006) insisted that teachers need "philosophies and strategies" to help them succeed in classrooms of more than one culture (p. 136). In particular, teachers must understand how their own prejudices are conveyed in their interactions with students, and teachers may need help to overcome "simple misunderstanding regarding minority students" (Mayes et al., 2006, p. 136).

Despite the rapidly changing "color" of U.S. schools, colleges and universities continue to disregard the need for multicultural experiences in teacher training programs (Mayes et al., 2006). Moreover, most prospective teachers are unqualified to teach in ethnically mixed urban settings (Mayes et al., 2006). This classroom dilemma is just one example of the many barriers adding to academic failure among minority students.

**Attempts to close the gap.** Addressing the combined effects of the above-mentioned issues, Oakes (1999) complained that although "Americans take pride that . . . we base upward mobility on ability, determination, and hard work in school . . . schooling still favors children from privileged families." According to Oakes (1999), "ambition and ability occurs with no less frequency in low-income families and among Blacks, Latinos, and immigrants, but relatively few of these groups are able to parlay those qualities into economic success" (p. iii). And,

compounding the problem, “the rhetoric of equal opportunity and merit mask [this] harsh reality” (Oakes, 1999, p. iii).

There is a need for multicultural education, a process, wherein students and school professionals learn from one another. The student needs time to learn and grow within the system and the system needs to learn more about the student and his or her cultural background. Missing from most schools is a vehicle that will allow ethnic minority students to grow, explore, and perform the essential functions needed to excel in the classroom. However, some schools in Utah are working to create such a vehicle through the Latinos in Action program (LIA).

### **LIA Strategies to Address the Education Gap**

Founded in 2001 by this study’s principal researcher, Jose Enriquez, Latinos in Action seeks to enhance the social, cognitive, and linguistic domains of Latino students by training them to mentor younger Latino peers. The repeatable elective course, tailored for junior high and high school students, is open to all students with GPAs of 2.0 or higher who speak some Spanish and some English. (See application for students in Appendix C.) The intervention was designed to lower dropout rates and encourage higher education among this at-risk population by increasing students’ school engagement and resources for building social and cultural capital.

A secondary goal of LIA is to give Latino students experience in the field of education, with the hope that some will choose to pursue teaching as a career—thus increasing the number of Latino educators and role models in schools. Clewell and Villegas (2001) studied partnerships between universities and local school districts aimed at decreasing teacher shortages in underserved areas and found that university students with prior experience as paraeducators completed their university coursework at a higher rate, were independently rated as more effective teachers, and tended to remain in the profession longer than students without

paraprofessional experience. Additionally, Ashbaker (2009) and Enriquez, Ashbaker, and Morgan (2002) found that volunteering as paraprofessionals inspired Latino youth to work harder in school, themselves.

The following section links LIA program components to the academic theories of social and cultural integration. The information about LIA is based on program design and anecdotal observations of the researcher. It is hoped that further support for those observations will be gleaned through formal study.

**Transforming resistance to resilience.** In LIA, students' feelings of resistance to the dominant culture are countered by interactions with the instructor, ideally a bilingual educator with a good understanding of and appreciation for Hispanic culture. Likewise, students meet successful Latino professionals from the community, who give guest lectures and informal support. These adults model some ways that students can look toward academic success without shortchanging their Latino heritage or identity. Perhaps the strongest modeling in this regard, however, comes from the students, themselves. With its minimum GPA threshold, the program attracts bilingual students who are serious about school; in turn, it also attracts bilingual students who become serious about school because they want access to the social support that LIA provides. These students then provide younger students seeking acceptance and attention a network of positive older peers that becomes an alternative to gang affiliation (Escobedo, 1993) and a powerful motivator against academic resistance. As a group, those involved with LIA celebrate heritage and embrace and work toward academic success.

**Recognizing structural inequality.** Unfortunately, eliminating feelings of resistance does not fix the problem of inequality. Curriculum for LIA courses invites students to look at inequalities head-on. For example, students use journal assignments to explore their identity and

the ways they have been shaped by all cultures of which they are a part. Class discussions help students label the differences between their cultures of origin and U.S. classroom culture. At the same time, celebratory experiences, such as involvement in school-wide and community dance performances, help students to feel a part of the broader cultural mix and learn to prize the good in each of their cultures.

**Verbalizing cultural discontinuities.** With specific training in class, students learn to verbalize their new understanding of cultural discontinuities in the educational system and, as translators, they help parents and younger students bridge those discontinuities. At the same time, their work at parent–teacher conferences and in classrooms with at-risk students helps to elevate Latinos in the eyes of educators, which begins to resolve any negative bias.

**Building sociolinguistic code.** Students grow in their ability to understand and communicate—elevating their sociolinguistic code—as they work as paraprofessional educators. The first part of the course trains students in the literacy methods that will be used: the Utah State Office of Education’s STAR: Student Tutoring Achievement for Reading program (2010) and Dr. Betty Ashbaker’s Teamwork Training for Paraeducators and Teachers Peer Mentoring Program (2001). Study and practice with these materials builds students’ own ability to use literacy skills and to appropriate academic discourse. The remaining weeks of the semester, students spend class time in elementary schools, tutoring. Interaction with students, parents, and teachers further reinforces students’ learning and builds their confidence in using their new code.

An important aspect of building students’ sociolinguistic code is encouraging them to refine their skills in both languages. Curriculum in LIA emphasizes that being bilingual gives students many cognitive advantages, including better understanding of the subtle aspects of language and nonverbal communication, better ability to follow complicated instructions, and

better performance on tests that measure creativity, spatial ability, and the ability to form concepts (Mayes et al., 2006). Students are introduced to an “additive” view of bilingualism in society and the schools, not a “subtractive” view. Within LIA they are taught that “bilingualism involving no loss of L1 [the native tongue] while developing mastery of L2 [the second language] generates many benefits,” among them “(1) higher cognitive development for the student (2) greater and more varied linguistic resources within the school and society and (3) increased cultural interaction and understanding, leading to the mutual enrichment of the cultures involved” (Mayes et al., 2006, p.112). Ideally, through the LIA service learning curriculum, students come to understand how to use their bilingualism to navigate the school system and help others. They experience first-hand how marketable they are and how many more networks they can access as their sociolinguistic code expands, through the maintenance of their culture and bilingualism.

**Augmenting social capital and school engagement.** Beyond volunteer work, students engage with the broader school community through extracurricular activities of their choice. Historically, Latinos have been underrepresented in school sports, arts, and other activities (for a study comparing Mexican-American students to White students on these dimensions, see Ream & Rumberger, 2008). This creates disadvantages in feelings of belonging and engagement (predictors of school success) and, perhaps equally important, disadvantages in terms of activities to list in college and scholarship applications. With these problems in mind, LIA requires students to become involved in at least one after-school activity or club. In the process, students build on their innate, cultural networking ability, making friends outside the Latinos in Action group and accruing additional social capital.

**Boosting cultural capital.** The upshot of these opportunities is that when it's time for college applications, LIA students have much to write about and many resources to whom they can turn for advice. In essence, they have created their own cultural capital. Anecdotally, it appears that LIA's emphasis on building students' social, cognitive, and linguistic domains through the three pillars of leadership, service, and literacy is paying off.

### **Initial Data in Support of LIA**

Since the program's beginning, LIA has grown exponentially. It operated in 58 Utah schools for school year 2011–2012, as well as in a few schools in Washington State and Idaho. The program enrolled a total of 1375 students for the 2011–12 school year and has involved an estimated 4380 students since 2001. So far, every student enrolled in Latinos in Action has graduated from high school. In 2010, 85% of graduating LIA seniors went on to college, almost all with significant scholarship aid. In recognition of LIA's success, the nationwide outreach program AmeriCorps chose the LIA for sponsorship beginning in 2008, helping to provide some funds for administration and growth. Additionally, the Utah State Office of Education partnered with LIA to provide literacy training manuals (through Student Tutoring Achievement for Reading, or STAR, available at [schools.utah.gov](http://schools.utah.gov)). The present studies sought to better understand LIA's role in assisting Latino students.

APPENDIX B:  
DETAILED METHODS FOR QUALITATIVE APPROACH

Study 2 comprised qualitative research on 200 student journals, written by students in the Latinos in Action program. I turned to qualitative research, as described below, to develop a better understanding of the findings in Study 1.

**Grounded Theory**

I hoped that study of the journals would help me to find a “grounded theory,” a theory that emerges through systematic analysis of the data. Strauss and Corbin (1998) emphasized that “a researcher does not begin a project with a preconceived theory in mind. . . . Rather, the researcher begins with an area of study and allows the theory to emerge from the data” (p. 12). Theory developed in this way is “more likely to resemble the ‘reality’ than is theory derived by putting together a series of concepts based on experience or speculation” (Strauss & Corbin, 2001, p. 12). In particular, I was interested in grounded theory’s ability to “enhance understanding and provide a meaningful guide to action” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 12) for LIA funders and administrators. In the end, my study was more descriptive in nature. I did not identify new grounded theory (although LIA program design is based on my own, less-formal theory); rather, I used methodology copied from grounded theory researchers to study and report insider perspectives.

Miles and Huberman (1994) viewed qualitative research as an attempt to find the perceptions of participants from the inside, describe the environment in which the question is asked, and then interpret or explain the meanings connected to the situation the participants are in. Thus, qualitative methods are appropriate in situations where one needs first to identify the

variables that might later be tested quantitatively, or where the researcher has determined that quantitative measures cannot adequately describe or interpret a situation. In terms of LIA, Study 1 identified that LIA students at a higher rate than their non-LIA peers do indeed plan to go to college, but was not conclusive about which program components contribute to that difference. Additionally, Study 1 could not determine the influence of self-selection on LIA versus non-LIA outcomes. Is it only the students who have higher educational goals in the first place who sign up for LIA? I hoped that Study 2 would yield “intricate details about phenomena such as feelings, thought process, and emotions that are difficult to extract or learn about through more conventional research methods” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 13) I approached qualitative research, then, with the purpose of exploring participants’ descriptions of their experiences.

### **Emic Approach**

Because a study of Latinos in Action bridges two important fields (namely, education and culture), it was essential that research processes reflect cultural sensitivity. Two important perspectives give meaning to the interpretation and observation that take place in cultural studies: emic and etic (Pike, 1993; Lett, 1990; Morris, Leung, Ames, & Lickel, 1999).

The emic perspective focuses on the intrinsic cultural distinctions that are meaningful to the members of a given society. With this perspective, little structure is given and interview questions and or textual prompts are very general, and participants freely express themselves. Follow-up questions may help to clarify the participants’ focus on a topic, but may not promote the focus of the researcher.

The etic perspective relies upon the extrinsic concepts and categories that have meaning for scientific observers. In an etic-oriented qualitative study, there is a pre-existing developing theory describing the relationships between the constructs. Etic coding, then, is being able to

code the descriptions, accounts, and analyses used in the text as conceptual schemes and categories that are seen as meaningful and appropriate by the expert scientists who are observing. They must be logical and correct according to the scientific community. So it's those constructs that are being looked at as information from the outside in an objective view.

In part because my affiliation with LIA would not allow me to take an outsider's view, I decided to take the emic approach. Emic coding uses accounts, descriptions, and analyses expressed in terms of the conceptual schemes and categories that are regarded as meaningful and appropriate by the members of the culture under study—in this case, schemes and categories that emerge from the students' own words. Ideally, an emic coding scheme would be deemed appropriate by the insider's culture, as if the research simply reported a consensus reached by native informants. As a Latino, Spanish-speaking, former ELL student, myself, I felt comfortable using the constructs and wording that the students chose through their writing to create culturally sensitive, emic-based codes.

### **Process of Coding**

The process of coding is essential to developing grounded theory. Strauss and Corbin (1994) wrote that “grounded theory is a general methodology for developing theory that is grounded in data systematically gathered and analyzed. Theory evolves during actual research, and it does this through continuous interplay between analysis and data collection” (p. 273). Although I did not articulate an actual theory, I looked to coding procedures to solidify my descriptive analysis. The first two steps in data collection and analysis are open coding and axial coding.

**Open codes.** In order to initiate open coding, I carefully and thoughtfully read each journal. My objective was “to uncover, name, and develop concepts [by] open[ing] up the text

[to] expose the thoughts, ideas, and meanings contained therein” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998 , p. 102) . I identified 27 constructs as I looked for open codes. These ranged from positive comments about interaction with the tutee (mentioned by 150 writers) to the journal writer’s improvement on the ACT (mentioned by 10) (see full list in Table 2). Each construct received one count per journal that mentioned it; that is, if a single writer used wording or ideas similar to “happy to serve” three times, the code “happy to serve” received just one count for that writer. As open coding progressed, I developed a percentage rating for each construct that allowed me to compare frequency among the 27 codes.

**Axial codes.** The purpose for axial coding, the second step, is to explore the many relationships between the categories and themes that pop up during open coding, and then to find important connections between these categories. Sometimes the analytic process involves looking for matching patterns in the text.

I analyzed my list of open codes, along with their rates, to create nodes that could be grouped by similar concepts. This led me to three primary axial codes, as listed in Table 3: (1) satisfaction with progress of tutee (mentioned by 75% of writers); (2) growth in leadership (mentioned by 70%) and social skills (60%); and (3) increased drive for school success (57%).

**Selective code: Reflectivity.** Selective coding is a third, but optional, step in the process. In selective coding, the researcher merges the themes from the axial coding into an overarching theme or finding. During the open and axial coding, I noted that many, many writers used expressions that indicated their thought process or change in feelings. As can be expected from student journals (Fulwiler, 1982), these 200 first-person texts demonstrated a high degree of reflectivity. I saw this reflectivity, which was part of almost every open and axial code, as an overarching theme, or selective code (see Table 4). As discussed more fully within my article, I

concluded that LIA students' higher inclination towards college and their acknowledgement that school contributed to growth in their beliefs (compared to their non-LIA bilingual peers, as shown in Study 1) could potentially be linked to LIA students' opportunities for service and leadership (as mentioned in Study 2) and, especially, to the experience of reflecting on those opportunities. That reflection seems to play a critical role in solidifying both the joy they experience through service and their resulting drive to succeed.

APPENDIX C:  
GENERAL DISCUSSION

Although conducted separately and intended for separate publication, the studies that form this dissertation, when considered together, provide additional information about the intervention program Latinos in Action. Study 1 indicated higher levels of high school engagement among students participating in the program than among their Latino peers with similar GPAs who chose not to participate. In particular, LIA students said in the survey that school contributed to growth in their self-understanding—a finding supported by the high level of reflectivity found in LIA student writing in Study 2. In their journals, students expressed great satisfaction in seeing the progress of the students they tutored. Students also wrote about their own improved academic performance or their plans to work harder in school. Although not linked specifically in these studies, the researcher believes that students' experiences as paraprofessionals and their opportunity to reflect on those experiences (as shown in Study 2) play a role in the significantly higher levels of education that Study 1 showed LIA students want to receive.

**Limitations.** Aside from lower than desired numbers of participants in Study 1, the biggest limitation of the two studies was the affiliation of the principal researcher. As the founder and director of LIA, he was personally acquainted with the teachers and administrators involved in this study and with many of the respondents as well. While it is unlikely that students modified their answers to please the researcher, who was not one of their teachers, it is always possible in a study of this nature that the researcher may maintain bias both in questions asked and in interpreting responses.

**Future studies.** Duplication of this study involving more participants and an outside research team is recommended. Additional studies could measure academic progress of the elementary students tutored by LIA paraprofessionals. Efforts are now underway to track how much these students improve over the semester or year. Interviews could investigate the tutee's feelings about their interactions with the tutors and the change in their feelings about school. Similarly, interviews with the elementary teachers involved or with parents of LIA students could document changes in attitudes and expectations.

Longitudinal studies of tutees and of LIA participants, including measures of their post-secondary educational attainment, would be helpful in determining the value of the program over time. Researchers could investigate whether the act of reflectivity continues for LIA students long after they leave the program.

LIA provides an exceptional opportunity to measure the influence of Latino families on their children's academic aspirations and involvement. The following questions may guide future researchers: (a) Do students participate in LIA because their families support school and extracurricular activities; or does LIA become a mediating variable that encourages school success, as shown by differing school outcomes for participants and non-participants who come from similar, non-academically engaged families? (b) How does LIA help students from such families avoid academic resistance? and (c) Do students who choose LIA differ in fundamental ways from those who do not choose LIA?

Another important topic for research is the influence of immigration status on students' school engagement and academic success. Policymakers and educators alike could benefit from information about whether LIA and non-LIA students of similar documentation status process or experience their status in differing ways. Also in regards to students' backgrounds and origins,

researchers could study the effectiveness of cross-age peer mentors from similar ethnic backgrounds, compared to cross-age peer mentors of differing backgrounds. In the future, LIA's partnering with Utah schools that offer dual immersion programs may yield opportunities to study the ethnicity factor in greater detail, by involving fluent, Spanish-speaking tutors who are not Latino at all.

**Conclusion.** Based on the survey data from Study 1 and the themes revealed through coding in Study 2, it appears that Latinos in Action students leverage the camaraderie of positive peer pressure and motivating teachers to move forward academically. Journal entries indicated that students appreciated being in an environment where they felt they were part of something and where they were able to internalize the central and repeated message, "Yes, I'm going to college."

Journaling seemed to be an important reminder of LIA experiences. The German philosopher Goethe supposedly taught: "If you treat an individual as he is, he will remain how he is. But if you treat him as if he were what he ought to be and could be, he will become what he ought to be and could be." The opportunity that LIA students have to act as professionals and then reflect on their experiences (Study 2) seems to fuel their determination (Study 1) to succeed in high school and beyond.

## APPENDIX D:

## APPLICATION FOR PROSPECTIVE LIA STUDENTS



As a Bilingual \_\_\_\_\_ student, you will work at a local Elementary School to help children who are learning English as a second language. Your job will be to teach academic skills to help kids succeed, and to model responsibility, caring, self-discipline, and hard work. As part of the class, \_\_\_\_\_ students will receive training in leadership, teaching methods, mentoring, job skills, and college preparation. You can make a difference in someone's life!

You need to have at least a 2.0 GPA (unless otherwise discussed with counselor) to enroll in this class. Students will receive Advanced Credit or Elective Credit.) Latinos in Action is a full year class.

## Application for Latinos in Action 2010-2011

My Name \_\_\_\_\_

My year in school next year (circle one)

Sophomore

Junior

Senior

My favorite subjects in school

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Explain why you would like to be part of Latinos in Action.

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GPA \_\_\_\_\_

Please return this application to the Mrs.

Rm.

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