

# **Latinx Student Engagement and Academic Achievement (Logro Académico)**

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## **Abstract**

The pedagogical process of improving Latinx student engagement and academic achievement (logro académico) is not a “one size fits all” protocol. Using secondary research methodology as a data analysis strategy, I will identify, share, and discuss twelve suggested schooling approaches to improve K-12 Latinx student engagement and academic achievement outcomes.

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## **Data Analysis Strategies**

### **Secondary Research Approach and Schooling**

The rigorous empirical investigation, unpacking, and reshaping of schooling requires thoughtful examination, analysis, exploration, and interpretation of various existing sources. The re-review of dated findings with the mindset of “searching anew” discernment, reinvigorated viewpoint, or idea could be beneficial to address our current learning problems, issues, and dilemmas. It takes a keen and patient eye to discover the patterns hidden in various seasoned works and piece together new meaning and opportunity. Although there may be limitations; note the undeniable gains could outweigh the suggested limits. Using secondary research is akin to employing mosaic tile pieces of color created by others, each current small tile (study) represents a unique “story” or “insight.” The urban pedagogist (artist) creates a new awareness, perception, and understanding by rearranging the mosaic tile pieces to form a fresh innovative pictorial pattern of knowing. Schools become the opus, canvas, and learning spaces to innovate.

### **Culturally Responsive Education (CRE) Schooling**

Culturally Responsive Education (CRE) schooling strategy has become the pedagogical exemplar and instructional norm among many schools concerning student equity, diversity, and academic achievement. The goal of culturally responsive education is not about a “one size fits all” approach. Urban pedagogists and curriculum theorists believe that every student is an

individual. Urban pedagogists acknowledge, particularly students from certain ethnic and racial groups, their rich experiences, individual preferences, beliefs, and personalities as value added. This vision provides the framework for academic improvement. The intent as an urban pedagogist is to merely develop instructional strategies designed to eliminate barriers and ensure the learning experience “makes sense” to the learner (Protheroe, 2004).

The school culture is essential to hosting this notion of sensemaking through thoughtful student growth, development, engagement, and academic achievement. The emergence of school culture is organically formed. The construct and context of culture provides critical developmental elements concerning the group norms and their structural stability, breath, depth, patterning, and integration. The concept of culture is the deepest, often unconscious part of schooling and is, therefore, less tangible, and less visible than any other part of schooling. Culture can influence the overall operations of a school and could surpass the tenure of any school leader, teacher, or stakeholder (Schein, 2004).

### **Culture and Schooling**

Culture and schooling are milieus seasoned with artifacts of traditions, values, rituals, and practices. These behaviors, while infused together as a coherent whole, elevate the meaning and influence of home (family), peers, and school. Over the last two decades, in the social context of schooling, we have experienced an increased share of school-age culturally rich student populations (Latinx and African American students). To this end, there is a need to study, understand, and use our students’ “cultural knowledge” as a foundation for pedagogy, curricular content, and schooling. To understand our students, we must take time to get to know our students. I would recommend schools use the Reflective-Interpretive-Inquiry (RIQ) method, a strategy designed to compile and examine information that supports understanding the relationship among culture, cognition, and school learning. Relationship building is a key factor in academic success.

### **Phase One**

#### **Relationship and Care-Driven Theory**

Thoughtful engagement activities and relationship building opportunities between school and student could cultivate a sense of meaning. When students value the learning experience, they will engage and want to achieve (Rogers & Renard, 1999). The act of *connection* is an important phenomenon concerning human interaction, learning, and personal growth. To stimulate achievement through relationship and care-driven methods, schools should consider: a) using dress rehearsal scenarios to refine student work (Rogers & Renard, 1999), b) creating a sense of value or academic urgency among students, c) generating a learning environment where students develop a “history of success,” d) establishing “participatory teaching” opportunities where students are involved and take personal investment and ownership in their learning experience, and e) initiating an ethic of care. According to Margaret Barrow (2015), *caring* is essential to a student’s self-determination, social responsibility, and strategic thinking . The act of caring is a simplistic human attitude, but an attitude often lost in the practice of schooling.

The act, commitment, and maintenance of creating a caring school culture is personal and continuous; it requires knowledge, energy, and organizational skills. Care unlocks intrinsic

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emotions that elicit the willingness to try. Care can smooth away the worries of academic embarrassment, struggle, and anxiety. Care connects us to the possible and encourages us to achieve the seemingly impossible. Care can begin to heal the wounds and trauma that plagues us through various experiences in our daily lives. In January of 2020, a virus outbreak occurred called COVID-19. This pandemic has cost approximately 1.2 million lives in the United States (mothers, fathers, grandmothers, grandfathers, aunts, uncles, cousins, brothers, sisters, children, schoolmates, friends, and colleagues) to date (Worldometers.info, 2024, “Closed Cases”). This devastation is equivalent to the entire total population of Rhode Island. The COVID desolation, impact, and change on our schooling community has been profound, exposing areas of academic need and personal healing. The need for healing from trauma has become the social emotional outcome sought after in many schools today.

### **Culture Therapy Theory**

What is healing? Healing is a process. Healing requires patience, empathy, and care. Healing takes time. Healing has numerous forms, such as spiritual, mental, emotional, and physical outcomes. To reach wellness, wholeness, and restoration involves personal effort and patience. Conscientious healing is the process of taking what is broken and making it whole again. Our schools have the duty to provide healing and safe environments for all learners. Many schools, post pandemic (although, COVID-19 is still with us), are responsible for decreasing various conflicts in the lives of students. To govern the seen and unforeseen conflicts, it has been suggested that schools should become peacemakers as a part of culture therapy theory (Hones, 1999). Schools must protect the “student-self.” The student-self includes the salient relationship between our respectful self, relational self, and resourceful self (Hones, 1999). I would recommend accomplishing this end by schools practicing “conceptual cultural engagement code switching”, which is the act of linguistically, caringly, and culturally struggling alongside their Latinx students, African American students, and all diverse student populations throughout their entire learning process. In the first phase of our discussion concerning Latinx student engagement and academic achievement (logro académico), In phase one, I explored relationship building, caregiving, and social emotional healing environments.

### **Phase Two**

#### **Academic Achievement**

High academic performance is the primary desired outcome of every school. All students, specifically Latinx students seek to acquire knowledge, develop skills, and explore new experiences. Disappointingly, academic access, resources, and a sense of belonging differ from one ethnic group to another ethnic group. Latinx students require to see their racial self and cultural self as a part of the schooling process. For Latinx students, shaping an identity encompasses struggles between one’s Latinx ethnicity and the dominant culture. It is an ongoing conflict of resilience, persistence, concession, and angst (Quiroz, 2001). Incorporating the voices of Latinx students within the schooling process will provide Latinx students personal meaning and achievement. For Latinx student voices to be empowering, they must be heard by others, not

merely spoken (Quiroz, 2001). Schools should be urged to heed the value of their student's *language diversity* and the ways it can improve academic achievement.

Latinx student language diversity discourse is shaped by their family, community, and personal identity through their phonology, inflection, grammar, and codes of linguistic engagement (Delpit, 1990). Schools must be respectful of the individual linguistic knowledge Latinx students bring to the schooling process. Schools should find ways to celebrate the linguistic diversity of their Latinx students. Further, schools ought to intentionally incorporate their Latinx students' linguistic knowledge of home (family), community, peers, and personal identity within the curriculum. Home, family, and loved ones are an important part of the Latinx diaspora. Latinx parent (caregiver) involvement plays a major role in Latinx student engagement and academic achievement (*logro académico*).

### **Parent (Caregiver) Involvement**

The parent or caregiver is the original teacher. Parents (caregivers) initiate the inaugural learning path. Parents (caregivers) are the first to open our imagination and dreams of possibilities that only a child can visualize, such as purple butterflies, pink unicorns, and strawberry cotton candy clouds. Parents (caregivers) provide the DNA of wonder; they offer us the cognitive, intellectual, abilities, skills, talents, and gifts to “be” whatever we are destined to “be.” Parental involvement can enrich the parent-student and home-school relationship. Particularly, parental involvement increases academic achievement among Latinx students and improves attitudes, mindsets, and behaviors toward schooling (Quezada et al., 2003). Consequently, schools can take various actions to include parent (caregiver) involvement concerning academic achievement improvement. However, parent (caregiver) investment alone would only be partially effective without “hard work.” In phase two of my dialogue, I considered Latinx student identity, student voice, and parent involvement.

### **Academic Achievement (Logro Académico) Schooling Strategies**

There are twelve suggested schooling strategies to improve academic achievement:

1. *Create a welcoming “homeplace.”* Creating an inviting homeplace for all students, families, and community stakeholders will allow schools to embrace diverse thinking, diverse creativity, diverse experiences, and perspectives. A homeplace encourages participation and thoughtful engagement from various groups. The school homeplace reflects the community it serves. The school-home relationship can be affirmed by establishing a homeplace.
2. *Celebrate the diverse knowledge, linguistics, and creative vibe of each learner experience.* This ambiance in schools will create a sense of belonging. Every student will “see themselves” as an integral part of the school and school curriculum. When students “fit in,” they improve their desire to academically perform. The need to be appreciated is fundamental for every individual.
3. *Incorporate the home (family), peers, and school values.* Many diverse communities

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see schools as an extension of the home. Their home (family), socially developed principles, and rituals have meaning. This is a central investment and partnership throughout the schooling process. The integration of family life beliefs, ethics, tenants, peer experiences, and the school standards will improve academic performance.

4. *Develop “accountability” looping (student, home, and school) systems.* Schools should demonstrate a willingness and an answerability to the needs of their student’s home (family) and community. While students and their families (caregivers) must accept their responsibility, ownership, and obligation to connect with schools, the accountability looping strategy is a reciprocated process. By means of regular communication, feedback, and follow-through, schools, parents (caregivers), and students can establish significant relationships.

5. *Demystify the school system’s structures, protocols and cultural norms for parents and students.* The simplicity, clarity, and transparency of any system can be useful. Unfortunately, school systems often find themselves counter to this belief. The culture of schooling can be daunting for many families and students. The demystification of school norms could unify purposes for all stakeholders. Parents (caregivers) and students can acquire an understanding of school expectations, goals, and outcomes.

6. *Reimagine classroom practices (pedagogy) to be congruent with student cognition, language, motivation, and social norms.* The classroom can become the teacher’s playground for student growth, development, and access (easier said than done). Schools must find ways (strategies) to incorporate into the academic content the lives of their students. Schools should take the time to really know their students and explore their communities. Schools with a reimagine mindset can create learning environments that make connections, motivate, and encourage students to learn.

7. *Use role playing and storytelling as an instructional strategy to improve academic achievement.* The pedagogy of role playing allows students to explore authentic life experiences. Role playing instruction encourages tactile learning and rehearsal skill development protocols. Further, storytelling strategies, a keen element of oral traditions, can improve cognitive sequencing, comprehension, and critical thinking. Storytelling can improve our imagination and an understanding of our life and living. All students from pre-K to graduate levels can benefit from a “good story.”

8. *Create intentional pathways to develop non-traditional community-based relationships.* Schools need to seek intentional non-traditional relationships with community-based grocery stores, restaurants, laundromats, faith-based organizations, banks, non-profit organizations, small businesses, first-responder units, and local libraries. By developing partnerships with community libraries, schools could provide extended study opportunities after school and on weekends for students. Collaboration with small businesses can expand support for specific school-based projects. The connection with bank institutions could provide schools with real-time financial literacy curriculum for students.

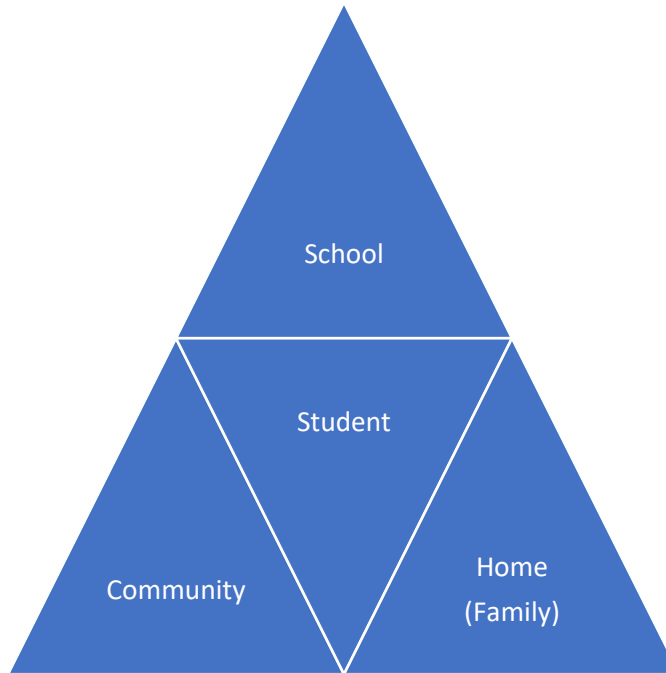
9. *Develop intentional home-school and school-home visits allowing parents (caregivers) to be collaborators and contributors to the schooling process.* Home and school visits must be purposeful. Home visits should include exploring the community, experiencing family traditions, sharing stories, learning about stakeholder needs, desires, and aspirations. Consequently, the parent (caregiver) and student should be involved in the scheduling and agenda of the visit. Home and school visits can be a valuable knowledge gathering school activity to be used as a part of the school curriculum.

10. *Host school and parent “dialogue circles.”* The dialogue circle (DC) is an intentional common space designed to connect, engage, sustain, and provide equal voice for all participants. The dialogue circle also is committed to building thoughtful relationships and finding productive solutions toward K-12-schooling issues. The dialogue circle requires schools to be fully present at the academic table in their authentic selves ready to discuss difficult topics and solve challenging issues with the willingness to manage uncertainty. The dialogue circle (DC) framework includes DC Care Facilitators, DC Preparedness, and DC Protocol.

11. *Develop Parent and Engagement Plans (PEP).* Parent and Engagement Plans (PEP) are actions, activities, norms, and responsibilities formed between the parent (caregiver) and school. Parent and Engagement Plans can be agreements of engagement with measurable goals and outcomes. Schools should ensure that parents (caregivers) have autonomy with the PEP process. Also, schools ought to include student voice in the Parent and Engagement Plan. The Parent and Engagement Plans are tools to improve a sense of belonging and academic achievement.

12. *Host workshops or training on creating an “Academic Learning Space” at home.* The home academic learning environment is designed for students to focus, concentrate, and study with limited disruptions. Home learning spaces provide various benefits to the learner in academic discipline, organization, and completion. A designated home learning space can motivate students to learn. Home learning spaces can improve students’ work ethic. Overall, schools should support families to create academic learning spaces for their students.

Schools are poised to provide pathways for lifelong learning, knowledge, and choice. Conceptual frameworks are theoretical overviews of intended concepts, theories, assumptions, pictorials, or phenomenon to be explored. The Latinx Student Academic Achievement Triangulation Model (see Figure 1) consists of four constructs (home/family, community, student, and school) designed to improve academic achievement. The home (family) triangle represents part one of the foundation of the Latinx Student Academic Achievement model. The home (family) can be seen as the original learning center and personal space for Latinx student growth. The community triangle embodies part two of the foundation of the Latinx Student Academic Achievement model. The community environment can provide insight concerning student life and non-school learning experiences. The student triangle symbolizes the “whole child.” Latinx student “wholeness” includes cognitive, social emotional, creative, and physical competencies. Finally, the school triangle signifies the apex of Latinx student engagement and academic achievement.

**Figure 1***Latinx Student Academic Achievement Triangulation Model***Reflection**

Student engagement, improvement, and academic achievement is not easy. Schools must be committed and “all in” concerning creating engaging responsive academic settings. School leaders, teachers, parents (caregivers), students, and community participants ought to obligate themselves to one another. We must be ready to share our resources, knowledge, and care. I contend that the strategies discussed to improve Latinx student engagement and academic achievement would be appropriate for all students. However, the willingness to invest and the desire to give of our selves requires devotion. One has to be devoted to the schooling process, the entire schooling processes. The schooling curriculum course from pre-K to 12th grade takes approximately 2,340 days to complete. What is your level of commitment? Many stakeholders are present in the early years, pre-k through 5th grade. What about the later years, 10<sup>th</sup> grade through 12th? The mission, if you choose to accept, is “about making a better human being by improving Latinx student engagement and academic achievement.” This task undoubtedly requires time. Unfortunately, those who are in authority do not always allow the learner to discover, be curious, make mistakes, and grow at their own pace.

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