Academy for Teacher Excellence:
Recruting, Preparing, and Retaining Latino Teachers through Learning Communities

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Research supports the importance of ethnic minority teachers as role models for diverse populations (Zirkel, 2002). Quiocho and Rios (2000) poignantly argue that minority teachers bring a unique critical perspective to schooling because of their personal experiences. Equitable ethnic representation and distribution among school faculty appear to positively impact student achievement (Meier, Wrinkle, & Polinard, 1999).

Regrettably for first generation/ethnic minority students, college graduation and teacher certification completion rates are dismal (Haselkorn & Fideler, 1996). Several reasons exist: college enrollment rates, increased tuition costs, academic preparation and attrition, and wider career options. Equally worrisome is that teacher shortages exist in areas critical to minority students' success, specifically in bilingual education, special education, mathematics edu-

cation, and science education. Even more disconcerting, a large number of teachers do not feel adequately prepared for teaching in diverse settings (Lewis et al., 1999). As the demand for equity and accountability for high student achievement and success of ethnic minorities, higher education institutions must re-examine mechanisms for recruiting, preparing, and retaining minority teacher candidates. Universities must acknowledge that the preparation of teachers requires retrospection and an examination of higher education's relevancy among institutions that comprise the P-20 pipeline.

Ethnic minority students are likely to attend community colleges prior to transferring to a four-year institution (Recruiting New Teachers, 2002). Wilson (2001) suggests that collaboration between community colleges and universities is essential in addressing the current teacher shortage and in assuring retention and success of teacher candidates. This is vital for increasing the number of minority teachers. Further, to augment the pool of ethnic minority teacher candidates, their academic success must be assured (Flores & Clark, 2002). Although there has long been a call for changing the way universities prepare teachers (Clark, Flores, Riojas-Cortez, & Smith, 2002; Futrell, Gómez, & Bedden, 2003), to date there has not been a systematic, viable model proposed that clearly considers all constituents and issues.

The Academy for Teacher Excellence

The Academy for Teacher Excellence (ATE) at the University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA) and San Antonio College (SAC) is proposed as a comprehensive model whose overarching goals include: (1) creating a learning ecology that values diversity and prepares teacher candidates for work in diverse communities, (2) increasing the number of Latino students pursuing teacher certification, and (3) preparing all teachers for linguistically and culturally diverse populations. ATE's ultimate outcome is to assure that diverse school populations have equitable opportunities for school success. These goals are addressed through five critical components, shown in Figure 1: Teacher Academy Learning Community, Faculty Development, Faculty Research, School Partnerships, and Induction Support. Essentially, all these components form a cohesive, comprehensive model that teacher preparation institutions can adopt to further enhance the learning ecology for both teacher candidates and their future students. In this paper, we will exclusively examine the Teacher Academy Learning Community (ATE-TALC).

UTSA is a Hispanic-Serving Institution producing one of the largest numbers of Latino teachers in Texas and third largest in the nation. Over the last five years, UTSA has improved passing rates from 70% to 97% on the teacher certification exam. Several reasons account for this high passing rate: curricular alignment with state certification standards; increase in tenure-line, lead faculty for undergraduate courses; diversity standards incorporated into the curriculum; and standard syllabi across course sections. Unfortunately, the overall retention rate for undergraduates

Figure 1
Academy for Teacher Excellence:
A Comprehensive Model for Teacher Preparation
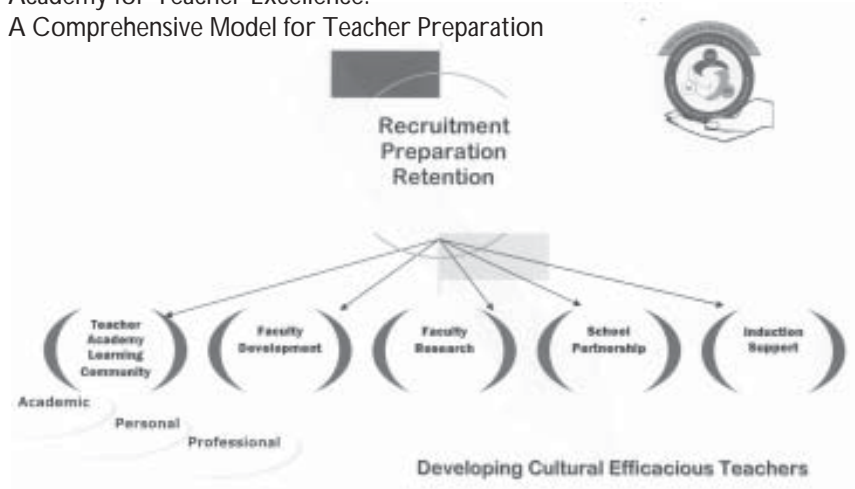
is only 61% and on average only 8.8% of the total student population (n = 25,000) graduate in four years. In Henson's (2006) study of UTSA freshmen cohorts, he notes that approximately 40% of entering students dropped out during the first year and that nearly one-third of students take six years to graduate.

San Antonio College (SAC) is the largest community college in San Antonio, and the largest provider of post-secondary education to Latino students in Bexar County, Texas. Approximately 75% of SAC education majors transfer to UTSA. Although collaborative agreements exist between UTSA and SAC, there was no formal structure to support teacher candidate recruitment and retention prior to the implementation of the ATE.

While both institutions have increased their numbers of Latino students, retention and graduation rates are areas of concern. The majority of teacher candidates are transfer students from the community college, bringing different course work configurations. The university did not have the mechanism to identify beginning freshmen pursuing teacher certification. To address these issues, a Title V Strengthen Hispanic-Serving Institutions grant proposal creating the Academy for Teacher Excellence, as a collaborative partnership between UTSA and SAC, was submitted to the US Department of Education.

The Teacher Academy Learning Community (ATE-TALC) is central to the University's strategic goal of increasing the number of Latinos who complete their degree and central to ATE's goal of increasing the number of Latino teachers. However, recruitment of Latino students into the teacher preparation program will not necessarily produce more Latino teachers unless there is concerted effort for the retention of these students from the onset, throughout graduation and the induction

year. ATE-Teacher Academy Learning Community has three basic premises. First, the success of students, in general, and of Latino undergraduates, in particular, as teacher candidates is dependent on the quality of the teacher preparation program. Secondly, at the core of any retention and success strategy is the recognition that diversity (cultural, linguistic, gender, etc.) plays a role in the definition of a strategy and its delivery. Lastly, in addition to being successful college students, teacher candidates must acquire persistence, social integration, and perseverance to assure their retention and receive the preparation necessary to become culturally efficacious teachers—possessing both sociocultural competence and a positive teaching efficacy.

Conceptual Framework

A strong conceptual and theoretical framework drawn from research across fields guides the ATE Teacher Academy Learning Community (ATE-TALC) activities, which are research-based and based on models that are adapted for the local context. Specifically, college retention and success issues are examined through the concept of student validation (Rendón, 1994; Jalomo, 1995), Tinto's (1993, 1997) model of college student departure/attrition, and Padilla's (1999) Student Success Model. These theoretical perspectives along with other teacher education research are integrated into the conceptual framework to assure that not only we increase the number of Latinos pursuing teacher education, but that they are retained throughout the teacher preparation program and in the profession. Such an approach ensures that we are serving the needs of current students in the particular settings where they are actually studying and teaching. In addition, research-based practices with strong theoretical foundations provide the best opportunity to strengthen the capacity of academic institutions to serve the needs of Latino, low income, and minority students—and indeed of all students.

College Student Retention and Success.

Given that a large number of Latino students are first generation, Rendón's (1994) and Jalomo's (1995) research highlights the importance of student valida-tion as a retention strategy. They concluded that minorities successfully transition from high school to college when college personnel acknowledge and validate students' prior experiences and knowledge.

Learning communities have been identified as a successful retention strategy and the impetus for the implementation of learning communities has been provided through Tinto's (1993, 1997) Model of College Student Departure/Attrition. Three fundamental ideas that capture the essence of this model have remained basically intact: academic integration, social integration, and goal commitment. Bridging institutes, mentoring, and parental involvement are strategies that facilitate the academic integration of Latino college students.

Social integration is a prerequisite for student success. Research (Cabrera, Nora,

& Terenzini, 1999; Dumas-Hines, 2001) shows that campus climate (presence of ethnic minority faculty, a racially diverse climate, other ethnic minority students, and a valuing of diversity) attract ethnic minority students. Social integration allows students to "fit in" and to feel that they are a part of the campus. Maximizing academic and social integration offers the best chances of success for college students (Stage, 1989).

Students who persist have a higher commitment to their goal of obtaining a college degree. For minority and low-income students, goal commitment is often threatened by lack of financial resources, support from significant others, uninviting campus climates, etc. To counteract stressors and maintain the student's goal commitment, effective support services include counseling, advising, tutoring, relevant social activities, and family support.

Padilla's (1999) Student Success Model borrows insights from 'expert systems thinking' to develop local models of student success in college. The basic idea is that successful college students in effect become experts at being students in the particular college they are attending. To become expert students, undergraduates must develop a sufficient quantity of formal (i.e., theoretical) and heuristic (i.e., informal, practical) knowledge that will permit them to navigate the institution and graduate. Heuristic knowledge is used to guide student services delivery, to orient entry college students (and throughout their collegiate career), and to enhance their success (Padilla, 1999). This knowledge can be acquired within the learning community.

Essentially learning communities as a support structure improve the quality of undergraduate education (Smith, MacGregor, Matthews, & Gabelnick, 2004). Grade-point-average (GPA) differences have been noted for learning community freshmen as compared to their non-enrolled counterparts (Tokuno & Campbell, 1992). UTSA's learning communities have shown impressive results (Henderson, 2003). When comparing the retention rates for all Latino freshmen in UTSA's Learning Communities, the data indicate a 12.3% higher retention rate and a .33 higher GPA than those for non-participant Latino freshman. Collectively, this research supports learning communities within the university setting as prompting greater retention and higher academic success.

Latino Teachers' Recruitment, Retention, and Success

Several studies have specifically explored recruitment, retention, and success with Latino students pursuing the teaching profession. Approaching the preparation of teachers from a developmental, holistic stance that goes beyond the academic domains is an essential consideration (Carrier & Cohen, 2003; Flores, Claeys, & Wallis, 2006; González, 1997).

Calderón and Díaz (1993) have made the following recommendations to ensure success of Latino students aspiring to become teachers: (a) early recruitment; (b) support structure; (c) field-based experiences with mentor teachers; and (d) support system for novice teachers. Similarly, González's (1997) found that minority

teacher candidates' satisfaction, retention, and completion was contingent on (a) academic support and skill development, (b) caring mentors and a supportive network, (c) nurturing environment, (d) cohort design, (e) setting of educational goals, (f) volunteer work, (g) high academic standards, and (h) mediators for navigating and accessing university structures. Parallel characteristics have been found in successful bilingual teacher preparation projects (Carrier & Cohen, 2003; Flores & Clark, 2002) and for paraprofessionals pursuing teacher credentials (Valenciana, Morin, & Morales, 2005).

No example has been found to date that specifically uses retention and success strategies as described in the college retention literature during the teacher candidate's freshmen year. This is unfortunate because retention rates for Latino students during the first years of college are not promising. High-stakes entry testing often results in teacher candidates following a remediation track rather than a college degree track (Flores & Clark, 2004). With exception of the program described by Valenciana et al. (2005), usually the cohort model or learning community concept has been incorporated into the professional teacher preparation sequence during the last year whereby mostly positive outcomes have been observed (Flores & Clark, 2002; Gallavan, 2003).

Success of minority and majority teacher candidates is also impacted by the stance that the university takes toward issues of diversity (McIntyre, Byrd, & Foxx, 1996; Sleeter, 2001). Ignoring ethnic differences often results in distress and academic failure for ethnic minority college students. Thus, Clark and Flores (2001) along with Villegas and Lucas (2002) suggest that all teacher candidates must explore their own identity, self-conceptualization, and beliefs. Teachers' stance towards ethnic identity combined with cultural experiences will likely define their classroom interactions (Galindo & Olguín, 1996). Further, teachers' identity mediates their teaching efficacy (Clark & Flores, 2001).

Specifically, to increase the minority pool of teacher candidates requires attending to diversity issues throughout the program. Valuing and addressing diversity in educational settings fosters intellectual development (Knefelkamp & David-Lang, 2000), increases tolerance and understanding of racial and gender differences (Palmer, 2000), reduces racial prejudice (Chang, 2000), and capitalizes on strengths that emerge from diverse perspectives (Carnevale & Fry, 2000). Teachers prepared for culturally diverse setting are more likely to be confident, competent, and successful with all students and, perhaps, are less likely to leave the profession. Induction support during the first teaching year reduces social isolation and minimizes abandonment of educational goals (Ingersoll & Kralik, 2004). Fuller's (2003) findings from a state-wide mentoring program demonstrated that mentored novice teachers—as compared to those not engage in the mentoring program—were more likely to remain in the field. In comparing ethnic differences, this finding was also sustained. Retention of mentored teachers also occurred in high minority and high poverty populated schools.

Methodology

Since the ATE project is in its third year and all the goals have yet to be realized, we conducted a preliminary analysis of the ATE-Teacher Academy Learning Community's recruitment, preparation, and retention strategies. Strategies were identified through journals, teacher candidates' comments, and coordinator reflections and through triangulation of multiple sources from participants, such as journal notes, emails, and seminar reflections (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Trustworthiness was further assured through peer review. Participants' reflections will be utilized within this paper and pseudonyms are used to protect their identities.

Findings and Discussion

ATE-TALC Recruitment Strategies

To increase the ethnic minority teacher pool, potential teacher candidates are identified from a pool of Latino students consisting of incoming freshmen, students with undeclared majors or majoring in other disciplines, and transfer students from community colleges. Other minorities and non-minority students interested in teaching are also invited to join the ATE-TALC. Three effective recruitment strategies have been identified: (a) program staff representation at freshman orientation sessions and campus events, (b) referrals from student service offices, and (c) faculty referrals. Noteworthy, these strategies were a result of the ATE staffs' concerted and deliberate efforts as elaborated in the following paragraphs.

During the first semester of funding, ATE staff at both institutions visited academic and student service offices informing department chairs and program directors of the ATE program goals and objectives. Recruitment flyers for the ATE-Teacher Academy Learning Community were also distributed. As a result, the ATE-TALC program was quickly recognized by offices across both campuses. At the beginning of each semester and throughout the year, ATE-TALC program coordinators were invited to participate in orientation sessions and general campus events to disseminate information and recruit potential teacher candidates. In addition to disseminating information about ATE, a collaborative network was formed with student service offices at both institutions. Formally instituted as *ENLACE* (to bind or join together), the network resulted in over 300 referrals. These referrals are instrumental in promoting ATE-TALC membership. Faculty demonstrated support of the project by inviting staff to share information in their classrooms at the beginning of each semester. Other prototypical recruitment strategies of new teacher candidates were accomplished through ATE webpage, flyers, and communiqués.

Often teacher candidates do not realize that there are various certification tracks or demand specialty areas. Switching from one certification track may result in loss of credit hours or require additional credit hours. Thus, it is important that teacher candidates be informed of these choices early in their program of study. Through

orientation and classroom presentations, potential teacher candidates receive information about critical teaching shortage areas and the benefits for pursuing these certification tracks. After a presentation on critical teaching shortage areas, teacher candidates often choose to specialize in these areas.

Over the last three years, approximately 750 students have directly participated in the learning communities. ATE-TALC student population at SAC is 86% Hispanic, 10% White, 3% African American, and 1% other. The majority (84%) of ATE-TALC teacher candidates at UTSA are Latino, with Black (3%), White (12%), or other (1%). Table 1 provides an overview of ATE-TALC participants to date from each institution. At each institution, ATE-TALC services provided are made available to non-participating students, but data are only collected from those students enrolled in the learning community. In sum, recruitment strategies require resolute efforts, which can be realized by leveraging existing resources within the university and the community college.

ATE-TALC Preparation and Retention Strategies

The ATE-TALC as a support structure attends to the preparation and retention of teacher candidates. While SAC offers traditional learning communities with specific linked gateway courses during freshmen year, UTSA approaches the learning community through a hybrid approach in which TALC staff or peer mentors create a community of learners with teacher candidates at different levels of preparation. As Flores et al. (2006) observed, teacher candidates benefit from the community of learners' format because regardless of their academic level in their teaching preparation program, they work collaboratively to grow academically, emotionally, and professionally while also dealing with personal and institutional barriers. Unlike other learning community programs, the ATE-TALC emphasizes the concept of teacher candidates' holistic development throughout their preparation and the first year of teaching vis á vis three strands described below: academic, personal, and professional.

ATE-TALC Academic Strand. In addition to coursework in an interdisciplinary teacher preparation program, the academic strand incorporates academic and social integration. Particularly in this strand, teacher candidates familiarize themselves

Table 1

Fall 2003 to Spring 2006 TALC Participants by Institution and Certification Sought

Institution	EC-4 General-ist	EC-4 Bilingual	Special Educa-tion	4-8th Math & Science	Secon-dary Math & Science	Other Secon-dary Majors	Totals
SAC	103	19	8	5	19		391
UTSA	79	124	16	9	20	103	351
Totals	182	243	24	14	39	103	742

with campus activities and learn to navigate the system while participating in social and academic support activities. As well as building a community of learners through tutoring and instructional support, teacher candidates meet periodically to participate in freshman seminars, cultural events, speaker series, and social events. ATE-TALC Summer Bridging Institutes provide teacher candidates with academic support and assist them in acquiring skills to be successful college students. For example, candidates identified as lacking writing or math skills were asked to attend supplemental instruction sessions, and then were encouraged to take the corresponding college entry proficiency exam. To date 17 teacher candidates passed their entry exam, thus making them eligible to take Freshmen English. Similar results ($n = 13$) have occurred in mathematics. Thus, rather than spending a semester in remediation, 30 teacher candidates became "College Ready."

These summer bridging activities assist teacher candidates to navigate the university and promotes their academic-efficacy. Gustavo relates: *"I learned a lot, and it (Summer Bridging) was very helpful, and it made me feel more secure and confident about beginning my first semester here."* As the teacher candidates progress through their program of study, their academic progress is continuously monitored. In a study over two semesters, ATE-TALC participants' grade point averages were significantly higher in comparison to a randomly selected group of non-participating students (Flores et al., 2006). Teacher candidates earning grade point averages greater than 3.5 and actively engaging in ATE-TALC activities are nominated for various national achievement awards (e.g., National Dean's List, Who's Who). To date over 181 ATE- TALC teacher candidates have been nominated, with the majority ($n = 160$) being Latino. Paulina comments:

> I attended a very small high school and was apprehensive about college. It was because of this program that I was able to make friends, establish networks, and gain experiences and awards. The ATE really opened up doors for me. (I) have (been) nominated me for "Who's Who," UTSA Ambassadors, and other . . . awards . . . This program really promotes leadership . . . the ATE program gives me access to great resources to help me become a great teacher.

Recognizing the teacher candidates' academic success and leadership skills also serve to enhance their self-efficacy.

ATE-TALC Personal Strand. Counselor interns sustain undergraduate teacher candidates' personal development during their university journey and throughout their first year of teaching. ATE-TALC teacher candidates transferring from the community college participate in Summer Bridging activities and orientation sessions that address prototypical personal concerns such as university size. Participants indicate that the orientation sessions specific to their career goals are especially helpful in alleviating concerns. As Joaquín states: *"I'm going to be transferring . . . but I really like all the opportunities that (ATE) presented to me . . . I'm glad that there are groups out there that help students."*

The personal strand develops persistence, self efficacy, and cultural efficacy in the teacher candidates. Often teacher candidates experience anxiety towards certain gateway courses especially in math and science. Through the Summer Bridging Program, teacher candidates' academic-efficacy is promoted by building their academic skills. After attending the institute, Mia writes: *"Thank you for a jumpstart in getting rid of my Math fears . . . sessions are worthwhile . . ."*

Through Guerra's (2005) LIBRE (free) model, teacher candidates acquire problem-solving skills by reflecting on their concerns, considering different options, and then acting on reasonable options. Teacher candidates report using the LIBRE Stick figure to resolve academic and personal issues. This process has been welcomed and highly utilized during the student teaching semester by the student teachers and their supervisors.

As a component of the personal strand, psychosocial support is provided by master-level counselor interns. Through weekly sessions, counselor interns assist teacher candidates with personal issues. Using the LIBRE model with teacher candidates, counselor interns gain a better understanding of the teacher candidates' worldview and have a framework for how to best support them as individuals. Some teacher candidates require more academic support, while others are in need of emotional assistance. By identifying the various challenges and listing them on the LIBRE graphic organizer, the counselor intern can then assist the teacher candidate choose the best intervention in order to meet the immediate and long terms needs of the student. When academic challenges are identified, a referral is made to the student academic center for assistance with time management, study skills, or tutoring needs. If the student is in need of emotional support, the counselor intern works with the teacher candidate by providing individual counseling services. Some situations may necessitate counseling, such as phases of life difficulties, dealing with different role expectations, or guilty feelings of leaving or "neglecting" the family to pursue individual goals. This support has been well-received by the teacher candidates as indicated in their reflections and high level of participation. Although other psychological services are available on campus, unique in the project is that the counselor interns are being specifically prepared to deal with issues concerning teacher candidates.

Other psychosocial support activities promote teacher candidates' exploration of professional dispositions, such as ethnic and teacher identity and teaching-efficacy. As teacher candidates progress through their program of study, another aim of this support system is to assure that they become culturally competent. After attending a cultural seminar focusing on ethno-mathematics, Clarissa states: *"I am glad that I got to expose myself to this kind of teaching ideas that are part of my culture. It instills a sense of pride in us that we should pass down to our students!"*

Thus, cultural seminars lead by project coordinators and counselor interns encourage teacher candidates to explore their ethnic identity and role within a diverse community. Similar to Durodoye's (1998) tripartite model, seminars include self-

awareness, knowledge of cross-cultural interactions, and cultural teaching efficacy skill building. Interestingly, ethnic minority teacher candidates may also have other motives for joining the ATE Teacher Academy Learning Community; as reflected by Elisa: *"I want to prove that minority teachers are excellent too."*

These cultural seminars also serve to challenge teacher candidates' misconceptions and beliefs about diverse populations. For example, teacher candidates' implicit beliefs about minority children's ability to learn or capacity for success are challenged (Flores, 2001). Thus, unraveling these perspectives requires critical reflection on the origin of these beliefs and examination of research literature in relation to these beliefs. The activities strengthen candidates' beliefs or expectations about their capacities and abilities, provide experiences that demonstrate interdependency of a diverse society, and strengthen their intercultural communication skills, respect and civic responsibility.

ATE-TALC Professional Strand. The professional strand provides candidates with advising, mentoring, and coaching. Initial career advisement also broadens candidates' knowledge of career opportunities within the field. After attending a session, Victoria captures the group's feeling in the following comment, *"This workshop was very helpful for me because I can find solutions to things that I need advice—dealing with my career."*

School and community field experiences assist in broadening the candidates' knowledge base and serve to cement theory with practice. During the first year of teaching, induction support is provided through an ATE-TALC field specialist. Once teacher candidates enter the profession, support such as mentoring and guidance are often not provided by the school district. Carolina, the induction field specialist notes this lack of support: *"Sometimes these mentors are too busy to help or didn't even know (supposedly) that they were to mentor a new teacher."*

Even though the teacher preparation program has addressed issues of pedagogy and provided numerous practicum experiences throughout their program for their teacher candidates, this knowledge and experience are developed under the guidance of a supervising teacher. As the field specialist notes, it is not unusual for novice teachers to be overwhelmed with all the instructional and programmatic decisions and demands required in teaching.

> . . . sometimes there is so much that you (as novice teacher) don't know. Is it what the adopted curriculum dictates or that which can allow you to be creative and lead to an engaging lesson? New teachers feel like there is only ONE right choice.

Moreover, approaches to curriculum and delivery differ across school districts, and students needs differ from community to community. Although this is the first year that the induction support has been implemented, the field specialist has observed some common stressors that novice teachers experience, for example:

> . . . not having a clear understanding of the particular school districts' scope and

sequence, … unfamiliarity with the hiring school district's expectations and policies, … unfamiliarity with the state's mandated exam's testing strategies, and (the role of) the campus improvement plan (in relation to curriculum alignment).

The literature recognizes that during the first year teachers go through phases (a) beginning with anticipation, (b) moving through survival and disillusionment around mid year, (c) springing to rejuvenation, and (d) ending with reflection and anticipation (Moir, 1991). It is also well documented that new teachers leave the profession during the first three years of teaching (Fuller, 2003). While many reasons are cited, a constant explanation for teachers leaving the field is that many feel unprepared to work with diverse populations.

Thus, during the transitional stage from the university to the classroom, the field specialist is a resource for novice teachers. Specifically, the field specialist provides novice teachers mentoring and coaching through seminars and school visits to ensure their success and that of their students. For example, assistance is offered in curriculum alignment, classroom organization, and classroom management. Seminars on these topics are helpful as indicated in Victoria's statement:

> It helped me emotionally, because sometimes as a teacher you are just in the classroom and don't have outside feedback. When I attended the sessions, it was like "*una válvula de escape*" (an escape valve).

Novice teachers experience eustress—while they are highly excited about being hired, they are also anxious about the professional demands and challenges confronting them. Novice teachers indicate that on-site visits promote their teaching efficacy through critical feedback. Novice teachers report a high satisfaction with the induction support; one novice teacher sums it best: "*We got encouragement, emotional and pedagogical support, and we learned a lot!*"

As a coaching activity, the field specialist assesses the novice teachers' needs through discussions and observations during an initial meeting. A follow-up reflection meeting is scheduled with the teacher candidate to address immediate concerns. Based on specific needs, the field specialist offers modeling of culturally relevant teaching strategies and lessons. Additionally, the field specialist develops and provides professional seminars where specific strategies are modeled to allow novice teachers to observe the implementation of instructional strategies or to deal with specific teaching issues. A follow-up classroom observation provides feedback on the actualization of these strategies. Novice teachers reflect that these experiences enhance their development in becoming culturally efficacious teachers.

Summarily, each strand—academic, personal, and professional— support the goal to develop culturally efficacious teachers, that is, to—(a) know their own and value and respect their students' culture, (b) use students' cultural knowledge in instruction, (c) understand how their ethnicity impacts student learning, (d) believe and ensure that all students can and will learn, (e) feel confident in their ability to teach all students regardless of external factors, (f) engage in reflective practices,

and (g) assure student achievement and eliminate the existing academic gap. The ATE-TALC model is unique in that the learning community concept begins at the onset of the teacher candidate's college career and continues through the first year of teaching. These efforts will likely ensure the retention of Latino teachers.

Conclusions

Recruitment strategies appear to be drawing potential minority teachers into the profession, specifically into critical shortage areas. In addition to teacher candidates' academic success and high satisfaction with the project, the success of the project has been measured by examining retention rates for ATE-TALC teacher candidates. Retention data indicate that incoming freshmen are being retained at each institution. SAC reports that of 390 ATE-TALC teacher candidates, only five students have dropped or have changed majors. To date 120 ATE-TALC teacher candidates have transferred to the university; of these nearly 90% are Latino. At UTSA, the ATE-TALC retention rate is also high with few students dropping out of the project. While some of the challenges still plague students, their retention is greater because of the support services. UTSA reports that of 351 teacher candidates approximately 20% have dropped due to academic, employment, or personal issues. Evidently, to sustain the overarching goals of the ATE, to ensure retention, and to assure the continued success of the ATE Teacher Academy Learning Community requires a collective synergy and the leveraging of resources.

ATE uses a comprehensive approach to support other retention and graduation strategies through (a) faculty development and research on the validation of the ATE-TALC component and other related issues dealing with minority student success, (b) greater collaboration with public schools and community colleges to create seamless policies and practices, and (c) elimination of institutional barriers that obstruct Latino and other students' path towards getting a college degree. The project's position within the university and community college are evident in the number of referrals from offices outside the college.

In the last three years, university administration has closely followed the progress of the project and has openly supported the goals and objectives as a model to be emulated in other colleges. The ATE staff has been invited to participate in the university's committees on diversity and minority student recruitment. Through research efforts and faculty development, ATE has been able to support UTSA's mission as an institution for excellence in education in South Texas. ATE is currently working to sustain and replicate ATE-TALC successful practices across both institutions. Three major sustaining efforts summarized the continued success of the ATE-TALC.

· *Identification and enrollment of minority teacher candidates in the learning community*. Reaching minority candidates who show potential, but are struggling to stay at the university has been the most challenging

issue. Providing support through bridging activities, peer mentoring, and problem-solving strategies appears to have much success. To date nearly 750 teacher candidates are participating in ATE-TALC.

· *Project ownership by faculty and students*. Through faculty involvement in research and their participation in ad hoc committees for the project continue to ensure project ownership. Both of these strategies appear to provide faculty an opportunity to share and become the "architects" of student success. Faculty members from across the college are conducting and publishing research related to the success of all, particularly Latino students in the P-20 pipeline.

· *Enrollment of faculty in professional development activities*. Faculty participation in research and development activities and in the selection of presenters and topics are creating greater response to professional development activities.

Continuously monitoring, evaluating progress, and making periodic program adjustments are key to the success of not only the project, but also to provide a venue for assuring the success of the teacher candidates as college students and effective teachers. Increasing and adequately preparing Latino teachers will likely result in positive student outcomes for underserved communities. Foremost these well prepared teachers will ensure equity and excellence in their future students' education, thereby improving minority student achievement and success. Additionally, these ethnic minority teachers will serve as role models for Latino children. Our aim is changing the current trajectory of under preparedness of Latino students across the P-20 pipeline.

In summary, the Academy for Teacher Excellence framework provides for increased synergy around P-20 efforts to strengthen teacher preparation programs that meet the demands of an increasingly diverse student population. The ATE Teacher Academy Learning Community's holistic development approach encompasses academic, personal, and professional strands. These efforts are the tenets that support teacher candidates in becoming culturally efficacious teachers. The enriched learning experiences within the ATE Teacher Academy Learning Community support the teacher candidates' passion for their chosen vocation-TEACHING.

Note

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