

## Abstract

### Restorative Justice in a Denver, Colorado School

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This paper tells the story of a research and professional development project initiated by university researchers and led by a group of Mexican parents. For purposes of this study these parents and their children were treated as indigenous to the United States. In that way the work of Linda Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, and Russell Bishop and Ted Glynn, *Culture Counts*, served as the foundation. While their work focuses on conducting research with Maori, the indigenous people of New Zealand, this story focuses on working with Mexican students and their parents in the United States and specifically in the state of Colorado. In alignment with Smith's work, researchers deliberately conducted themselves in ways that respected the dignity of these students and their parents by meeting with them in person, listening to their stories in a culturally appropriate manner, and assuming a position of humility, that is, learning from them. Drawing on Bishop and Glynn's ideas, this project focused on the concerns and interests of the these students and their parents. We were determined to have them benefit from the work by representing the reality of their experiences at the subject high school in such a way as to legitimate their voices and to be accountable to them in our work. Ultimately, the goal was to raise the awareness of these students and their parents about their experiences in the school. This story takes place in one large high school in the Denver metropolitan area where the Mexican

parents worked to dismantle the school-to-prison pipeline by introducing restorative justice practices in classrooms as a way of responding to wrongdoing and conflict. These practices were intended to reduce the number of referrals for disruptive behavior in order to keep these students learning in the classroom and out of the school-to-prison pipeline.

## Restorative Justice in a Denver, Colorado School

The Culture of Care Research and Professional development pilot project took place at Hinkley High School, which is part of Aurora Public Schools, located in Aurora, Colorado.

Approximately 2,000 students attend the school, with over 60% of those students identifying themselves as Latino/Hispanic, about 27% of those students being classified as limited English proficiency, and about 75% being eligible for free and reduced lunch.

This pilot project was divided into three parts by school year.

2011-2012: Needs Assessment

2012-2013 - Capacity Building

2013-2014 - Sustainability

The overall research question for the summative evaluation of this pilot project was: What is the effectiveness of the Culture of Care Research and Professional Development Pilot Project at Hinkley High School during the three school years starting in fall 2011 and ending in spring 2014?

In order to explore the answer to that question, a qualitative research approach was used, based primarily on an ethnography research design (Patton, 2002), since the purpose of the pilot project was to learn about and then change the culture of the school from a traditional culture focused on rules and punishment to a culture of care (Williams, 2014). In addition, the guiding methodology for collecting and analyzing data was participatory, based on the collaborative interactions of university researchers, Latino/Hispanic students, their parents, and teachers (Moll & Cammarota, 2014).

In the end we wanted to paint a portrait of what it was like to be Latino/Hispanic at Hinkley High School when the project first began and for the next three years as the culture at the school changed. Further, we are sharing the details of our work in hopes this report will be used to develop policy not only locally but in schools throughout Colorado, the United States, and elsewhere. We are humbled to report that not only has the culture of care research and professional development project spread to other schools in the Aurora Public Schools but also to other school districts in Colorado and other states. Also as a result of the success of this project, Dr Cavanagh has been awarded the prestigious Visiting Maori and Indigenous Studies Fellowship, to be held in the office of AVC Maori, Aotahi School of Maori and Indigenous Studies, School of Health Sciences and School of Teacher Education, at the University of Canterbury, in Christchurch, New Zealand, from February 23 to April 25, 2015.

### **2011-2012: Needs Assessment**

In the first year of the project we learned that relationships between Latino-Hispanic students and their teachers at Hinkley High School could make a difference in improving the learning of these young people. Building positive and caring relationships was at the core of creating a Culture of Care at the school. However, there was a lack of understanding regarding how to create a Culture of Care at Hinkley High School such that it would benefit Latino/Hispanic students. Therefore, we set out to not only introduce the theory of a Culture of Care to educators at Hinkley High School but initially to gather evidence so that we could gain an understanding regarding how to create that Culture of Care, particularly as it would help Latino/Hispanic students to flourish not only at the school but beyond, whether it be in the workplace or at college or university.

The initial work during the 2011-2012 school year was focused on a needs assessment. The central question to be answered was: What are the perceptions Latino/Hispanic students, their parents, teachers, and administrators regarding the experiences of these students at Hinkley High School?

### **Data Analysis**

Analysis of the student and parent focus group data was based on deconstructing the data using the process of typological analysis (Hatch, 2002). The identified typologies have their roots in the seminal work of Noddings (1992) regarding the ethic of care in the classroom. This work formed the basis of Cavanagh's theory, research, and practice of a Culture of Care in schools (Cavanagh, 2011, 2009a, 2009b, 2009c, 2008, 2007a, 2007b, 2003).

Valenzuela's (1999) interpretation of what caring means in schools guided this project. This description of caring calls for teachers to embrace two kinds of caring, which form the theoretical foundation for typological coding of the data collected:

*Authentic caring*, where educators in the participating schools care for their Latino/Hispanic students as culturally located individuals, with an emphasis on reciprocal relationships and interactions between these students and their teachers, and *Aesthetic caring*, where these educators care for the learning of these students, based on a commitment to ideas and practices that purportedly lead to improved Latino/Hispanic educational outcomes.

### **Findings**

Based on the data analysis, findings were made. These findings are divided by typology. The underlying meaning of each typology, as expressed by the participants, is captured in the themes and subthemes outlined. And the meaning attached to each typology, theme, and

subtheme by the participants is further explained in the words of the participants themselves in an effort to legitimate their voices. However, the connection between the two typologies needs to be explored first.

### **Good But Not Good Enough**

In talking about Hinkley High School in general, the mantra “Good but not good enough” emerged. One parent said, “I think that it is good but it’s not enough. If the teachers can put more importance in the students and try to teach them more hard that be great for them because I feel it’s too easy for them.” Both the parents and teachers explained what this mantra means in terms of aesthetic and authentic caring.

However, before the underlying meaning of each of the two typologies is discussed separately, we need to note that the participants explained that aesthetic and authentic caring need to exist together in order to achieve the best educational outcomes for Latino/Hispanic students. As one student said, “I think they come for ‘Well, I’m a teacher. I teach whatever I know, and they will pay me anyway. If I have a problem with this kid, I don’t care; I will pass. He’s not with me anymore. I don’t care about his life. I don’t care if he learns or not.’” Likewise, one of the parents said, “I, as a parent, the teacher has to focus on the education but also listen to the student.”

Given that background, now these findings are discussed based on the two typologies: authentic caring and aesthetic caring. The themes and subthemes for each typology will be identified. Appropriate quotes will be included to help with understanding the meaning the participants attach to each typology, theme, and subtheme.

### **Authentic Caring**

Authentic caring is the first typology to be discussed in these findings. Authentic caring

was defined by the participants, as teachers caring for the students by treating students like they were their own children. These interview quotes explain that idea in more detail. “They like treat you like their own child.” “They care about us, like if they see us doing something wrong they will like talk to us like you don’t want to be doing this and that. Like they will talk to us like if they were our own parents.” Three major themes emerged from analysis of the data connected to the typology of authentic caring: (a) creating and maintaining relationships, (b) sharing about one self, and (c) valuing Latino/Hispanic students as persons who are bilingual and bicultural.

**Creating and maintaining relationships.** One student described the importance of relationships in these terms, “The best teachers here at Hinkley are the ones that interact with students. Those are my favorites. I have teachers that are so, so, so smart, but I just don’t like to go and talk to them because I don’t feel like they interact with me enough.” To help with understanding the theme of “relationships,” four sub-themes were identified in the data analysis to describe what the participants said about this topic: being a friend, being aware of personal problems, offering support and encouragement, and valuing mutual respect.

**Being a Friend.** Students who were interviewed emphasized that they wanted teachers to know them on a person level by talking about teachers as a “personal friend.” “You can relate to her and be a personal friend with her.” “But yet like be your personal friend.” The description offered about what a teacher as a friend looks like was, “They will joke around with you, but yet they will be serious about the education; like not so very strict that you have fear for that class and teacher. Yes, you are learning a lot, but yet you don’t fear them, and you feel comfortable to stay and express your feelings however you like, and you know that they won’t judge you. Just know that if you feel comfortable around that person, when you need help, you will go to them, or like it’s a good relationship you have with your teacher.” The point is that the student will go

to such a teacher with a personal problem.

Teacher as friend was further described in these terms. “The difference is that when teacher talks they talk to you like you’re an adult. Not really an adult but in a way they teach you is like they are telling you information and you quite don’t get it, what they are saying, and with a friend, they explain to you what is a way that it works.” Ultimately as a friend a teacher “Tries to be there for you.”

***Being aware of personal problems.*** The idea of realizing a student has personal problems was further explained. “Some students are very smart, but some, they don’t know about the problems that they have at home or some other place. A good teacher knows when a student has problems at home psychologically or at school, and they usually are there to help them. Something that a good teacher has time to also talk to the parent and help the student.”

***Offering support and encouragement.*** The students who were interviewed expressed doubt about getting support from teachers and counselors and said they needed to be self-motivated. “Now that I’m this age I think that I, myself, am the one that can push myself the most because I know what I want and I’ll get there, so I don’t know so much about teaching support.” Another student talked about lack of teacher support in these terms. “I mean, like they won’t say you can’t do anything, but at least for me, it’s not something that they are always like ‘Oh, we know you can do it; we support you.’ I’m sure they do, but you don’t hear those things, but I’m sure there are other students that do have the right influence, but they feel like they are too slow. But I, as an individual, not really.”

This lack of support related to counselors as well as teachers. One parent said, “This counselor, she told my daughter that because she is Latina, she couldn’t do anything here in the United States. When she graduated she was the one that gave my daughter her diploma, and my

daughter told her that she did it. It motivated her to do well.” Another parent suggested that counselors can show their support by “Knowing about the student, learning about what they want to do when they graduate or if they want to continue their education.”

On the other hand, a student described how a teacher supported her. “I have my math teacher; I adore her. She is always there; like she’s always helping with everything. My English teachers, I love them. They -- I don’t know -- I just -- I feel like all my teachers have helped. Not only do they encourage me to go higher and higher, but they’ve gave me new ideas and such.”

***Valuing mutual respect.*** At the heart of teacher-student relationships is for the teacher “To have a relation with the student but with respect.” However, these students were not blaming teachers for the lack of respect in the classroom. Rather, students said mutual respect was a shared responsibility. “I think it’s not a teacher because, you know, all the kids right now they don’t respect the teacher. They don’t respect nobody. So that’s what I think.” A further explanation of this kind of respect was, “with their respect as a teacher because there is always going to be someone in the class who’s going to not like the teacher or disagree.”

One parent talked about respect in this way. “And I’ve so many people like kids don’t respect the teachers, so when the teacher try to teach them, they don’t care what the teacher is doing, and they play here, and they do whatever they want, and the teacher says, ‘Well, they don’t pay attention; I don’t care.’” Another parent said, “The students have to have more respect to the teachers. They do whatever they want.”

The students emphasized that the responsibility for creating a climate of respect in the classroom belong to both the students and their teacher. One student said it is important “for the students to learn how to respect the teachers.” Another student explained, “I think that has to be done here in school, the teacher have to earn respect.”

**Sharing about self.** The Latino/Hispanic students who were interviewed said they wanted their teachers to share about themselves on a personal level and with regard to the curriculum. One student said, “That would make teachers more successful with the students, if they understood their -- a little bit about their own life and their desires or their obstacles that they may run across.”

In addition, another student explained that teachers appear to be afraid to insert their personal experiences into the curriculum “Well, like there is those teachers. I sometimes feel like teachers have the fear of doing something that they shouldn’t, and that they might get fired for it. I mean, because there is always those teachers that want to give you knowledge beyond what the book says, and they hold back because they know that they shouldn’t...Like maybe a history subject, like giving us their opinion and teaching us more than but not really what the book says. They sometimes hold back their opinion on what they really think because of that reason, and I understand that because they know that their opinion might hurt someone, but that’s as to say any other student could upset them, and yet the students don’t. They could express their opinion. In classes you have student-to-student discussions, and like I could express my opinion, and they know that I won’t -- like it’s not my intention to hurt anyone. The teachers I think that they sometimes hold back on that because they are the teacher. They can’t really disagree with the student because of a personal opinion.”

Other students agreed when they said, “There are some times when we want to like, ‘Oh, so what would you think,’ and they would be like, ‘It’s not for me to say.’” “Or like just some stuff and it seems like they are in a fog, so they just can’t go out of the box because they are in fear of like being fired.”

**Valuing Latino/Hispanic students as persons who are bilingual and bicultural.**

These students articulated clearly that they do not feel valued by students and teachers as persons who are bilingual and bicultural. “I feel like many students at Hinkley don’t take that as a plus, having a different background. They -- I feel like some students feel less, so they don’t try as hard. So you don’t see many of us Hispanics succeeding in high school. That’s from my point of view, but I take it as an advantage, because I get to help out more and knowing, like she said, knowing Spanish, you can help out other students; you can help out teachers; you can put more into the school.”

Further, these students talked about how being bilingual is a barrier to their learning. One student said, “I like the school, and I like being here, but I want to be better, and I’m like -- I can’t like my language and that kind of stuff. I want to be like, I know it all in the second language, and I can speak really well. That’s why I can’t be in their classes.” Another student explained, “Yeah, like maybe she’s been -- that’s been her goal; she wanted to get into honors classes because she’s seen as an outstanding student in regular classes even though her English isn’t so good, but she over succeeds more than other students, and she barely started speaking English. Those are students that, you know, that they are supposed to be in honor classes but for some reason she can’t because of her schedule. It’s those kind of people that you want them in the honors classes, and they are not given the opportunity.” Further, a student said, “Yeah, that’s just I think; teachers could work with it, the language, but yeah, it’s something that does hold back students.”

How students are chosen for honors and International Baccalaureate (IB) classes was described by a parent in this way, “We notice that they give the opportunity to some students that they don’t have the capability of being in the class. They are not giving it to them because of their language.” A student agreed, “Yes, there are more programs that are pretty good. There are

some kids that are being put into this program that are not as capable of being in it because they are too big. We just want the system to be balanced. We want to know that individually, the capability of every student.”

Also the students want to be able to discuss problems in class in Spanish. “So if I’m a teacher and I’m explaining a math problem and we’re sitting together and we want to talk about how to solve the math problem in Spanish, the teachers are okay with that.” They want to be able to seek to understand ideas in classes outside of Spanish by discussing these ideas with their peers in Spanish because that is the language that is most comfortable for them to make sense of these ideas.

### **Aesthetic Caring**

Aesthetic caring was the other typology used to deconstruct the focus group data collected from the Latino/Hispanic students at Hinkley High School and their parents. Analysis of these data revealed that these people defined aesthetic caring in terms of the themes of: (a) holding high expectations, (b) being accountable, and (c) making learning fun.

**Holding high expectations.** The concern in this area is if teachers hold low expectations based on deficit thinking, Latino/Hispanic students will assimilate those stereotypes. As a student explained, “Well, some students, they are just, like, I’m Mexican; I’m going to end up doing something all Mexicans do. Like I’m going to go be a constructor or like something like that, and they don’t try as hard because -- I don’t know. I just don’t know how to explain it.” Participants in the focus group interviews spoke of this theme in terms of: (a) fostering critical thinking, (b) helping individual students, and (c) challenging students. These subthemes are described separately.

**Fostering critical thinking.** These students indicated they wanted teachers to foster critical

thinking by not telling them right away what the answer is, but rather encouraging them to think about the answer. “For example, teachers tend to like when students ask for help; they will just right away tell them the answer. I think they have to evolve on what they just asked so that the students can think more about it and not just like, okay, she just told me the answer. So they have their own thinking about it and their ideas, because some teachers just tend to spell everything out for you, and they don’t let you -- like obviously the kids won’t mind because that’s what they want, but if the teachers help the students try to think more by yourself but not really give you the answer, that makes the difference.”

***Helping individual students.*** Another indication of high expectations was the willingness of teachers to help individual students, particular those who are behind in their learning. “A student that is not learning is because there is something wrong. As long as they are not helping the student in that area, they can’t say I can’t help him. They need to find where to refer that student so they can get help and to focus on education. They should be looking forward on helping the student.”

Another student said, “I see education that the teacher has to give out their lesson; they see that a student is behind, they have to help the students. Not just going on with the class and not helping the student that’s behind. This is happening now, and we try to talk with the teacher, and they say they can’t do more. The excuses that they been giving us is that they don’t have more time, and the principal is not paying them for extra time. When a good teacher likes their profession, they find a way to help those students that are behind, and there is no excuse.” A student pointed out how the teacher needs to balance teaching the class and providing individual attention. “To worry to give the best class and at the same time observe the student that don’t understand; allow the time to help them.

Yeah, and they will be helping, like if you have any questions or anything, just come to me, and I'll help you out if you need help with math or science or anything; just come to me, and I'll tutor you, and I think the most important thing of a teacher is the way that they teach us, because I think the way they teach, we learn, and maybe like she said, that some students may be like I don't know what she is talking about, and some other ones will be like I know what she's talking about. Like some students will get right into the point what the teacher is trying to teach them, but some of them will be like confused or something."

***Challenging students.*** Both the Latino/Hispanic students and their parents spoke about the need for teachers to display high expectations by challenging students. One parent said, "She wants to be challenged. To me it's like there should be possibly more levels of distinction within these classes where they can separate these kids out even further. She's supposedly in the top classes she can be in, but she is not in with peers of her learning ability, and she is not being challenged at all."

High expectations were talked about particularly regarding homework. For these people homework is a sign of how rigorous the school is and of the level of teacher expectations. A parent said, "The expectations we learn in Mexico. We have homework every day, and right here, 'You have homework? No. Are you sure? No, I don't have homework. Really? Yeah, no homework.'" And a student talked in terms of, "Giving them more homework or more work in class."

Assigning homework is not enough. These students want teachers to use homework to check for learning. A parent explained the idea in this way, "Teacher doesn't put emphasis on helping the student; they just let them. For example, a math teacher, instead of telling them exactly what to do, they get confused. I see the paper that they take home, homework, the time

tables, they get confused instead of them learning each time table. Instead of telling the students to learn each time table, the one, three, five, they skip different. When they turn in their work, they don't take the time to notice how they write, how big or small they write, and how neat the work is. They don't really check the whole homework. They only check part of the homework, and I know that my daughter did some errors on some parts, and they don't really check."

Another parent talked about how she and her husband chose Hinkley because of its reputation for quality. However, they are disappointed because their daughter is not being challenged. "Because she's not -- She does have obstacles here at Hinkley that maybe could be addressed in some format, whether it would be in this format level or not. She came from Quest, the charter school. That's an accelerated program, so she is a very high achieving student, and we chose Hinkley. Even though it's not our home school, we chose this school because of the academic criteria they were able to offer my daughter throughout the four years, but we haven't seen any of that yet. She is in all the IB classes, all of the accelerated. She's bored out of her mind. She has no homework. She is not being challenged whatsoever."

The lack of challenge was expressed by one parent who explained, "My son tells me there are students that fall asleep in class, and they still pass that class." And perhaps the lack of challenge was best expressed by this student, "I don't feel like I'm being challenged enough. Like I want to have a challenge when I'm learning, and I feel like I'm just breezing through everything, not doing anything, not doing any work, and not gaining any study skills that I could use later on."

**Accountability.** These participants talked about accountability in terms of "holding them accountable for what they say." The subthemes that were identified based on data analysis help to explain the underlying meaning of the theme of accountability. Those subthemes were: (a)

being accountable for learning, (b) being accountable for behavior, (c) keeping students in the classroom, and (d) eliminating distractions and chaos.

***Being accountable for learning.*** One parent talked about the need for consequences when the learning is disrupted. “If the student were to say something that was inappropriate and interrupt other peoples learning, they might just say, ‘Oh, that’s not appropriate.’ But that’s not really holding you accountable for -- Like they should have more severe consequences if it is necessary, because either way -- If she doesn’t hold him accountable for it for the first time, he will continue to do it. So for the first time, he knows it’s more likely that it won’t happen.” A student explained, “Because there is those times when a teacher will tell them, but after a while they just ignore it, but yet it keeps on going.”

A student offered an example of this idea. “For example, in my literacy class last quarter there was a final project thing, and many students didn’t even turn it in, not even half, and it’s the honors class. And she’s like ‘Many of you students who didn’t turn it in, you guys shouldn’t be in this class,’ but I don’t see that she has reported them yet, and they don’t take it seriously. So I’m like what’s the point. That day she gave us an extra day so those students could catch up and do the essay when it had already been due and only eight students had done it. Why am I going to waste my time if I did my essay and sit here and read or do busy work while the rest of the class didn’t feel like doing it the day that it was due? No. I did my work, and now I’m going to stay here being punished, not being able to go on and move on and learn because other students didn’t choose to do it. I think that they should be more considerate to those that did do it and start focusing on the more eight students who did do it out of 20 some people. So that’s talk -- like it’s real world; they are not going to wait for you to do it. It’s due this day, and we move on.”

Accountability for learning was expressed by a parent in another way. “The teachers, they don’t get it. ‘If they learn, good; if they don’t learn, that’s okay. I just do my work. I teach them their lesson. That’s okay for me.’ I don’t know how we can do something for our kids, reinforce more in the school.” In the same way, a student said, “I don’t -- I think that maybe because of my other classmates in my classes, they have a tendency to not catch on as quickly as us, but it’s not their fault. It’s just that they don’t catch on as quickly, and so we tend to go over the same stuff over and over again, and that happens more and more because they talk instead of actually paying attention in the class. I’m left sitting there wondering what they are talking about when we are doing math and probability and whatever, and I’m like I’m done; where is everyone else.”

***Being accountable for behavior.*** In addition, to accountability for learning, these students and parents want accountability for behavior. “So like the first day they set their rules, and they hold you accountable for them so students will know what to expect, so it’s not a surprise.

Accountability for behavior was discussed in terms of being. “They have to be strict with students.” “I think they should be more strict, not the way they teach in Mexico, but more strict here.” “Somebody is falling asleep, to do something about it.”

A parent explained, “And I don’t know what the answer is, but it is just a matter of the kids -- they have never been held accountable for anything inappropriate that they have done, ever, and why should the classroom be any different? If they don’t want to pay attention they don’t pay attention. They talk to their friend. They play with this one. They are touching them there, pushing someone’s stuff off. It’s constant. My daughter says it is constant, every day, every day; if not every class, every day, and she is -- So I don’t know if we moved you in schools, if we would have a difference. I don’t know.”

The need for consequences was also discussed. “There is no consequence for bad behavior in the classroom, ever, except maybe you are sent out of that school if it happens enough. But, should that be to the sacrifice of everybody else’s learning? I mean, that is ridiculous. To me that child immediately should be sent out of the classroom, and I know it’s about not having enough people, people in the school to babysit all the, you know, ones that aren’t being respectful. At the high school level I don’t know that it even needs to get to that, ‘Oh, go down and have detention or go down and have’ -- I mean, there should be some consequences as far as leaving the classroom and failing the class and having to stay for a 13<sup>th</sup> year.”

However, detentions were not seen as an answer to detentions. “I’m not sure detention is the answer. They probably laugh. Like he was saying; like they are just laughing all through it. Is it detention with work attached to it; go clean the classroom, whatever, but they are not going to do that.”

***Keeping students in classroom.*** Further, detentions were viewed as keeping students out of the classroom where the learning occurs. “Go to the office, and they come to the office for detention, and all they do is like this. I don’t know if they put something to them for learning and learn; don’t pay to pay attention in class if not they be in detention doing something, not just lazy time there. Is better to be in the class and when they go to detention they need punishment.”

***Eliminating distractions and chaos.*** These participants, in particular, talked about distractions and chaos being the greatest barrier to learning in the classroom. They believe these distractions are occurring because of the lack of classroom management.

As one parent said, “It’s not really just in honors classes, but she sees that all the other classes are behind because it takes them so much longer to do what she has already done. So she wants

to be in honor classes. So she's not distracted because all these students are always interrupting, and it's not an environment for her to learn in because she can go faster than they are going, so that's her major thing."

Another parent said, "She's in the accelerated classes with other students who supposedly are at the same level. There is so much distraction in the classroom, she tells me every single day there is three classes that she despises going to, not because of the teacher, not because of the material, but because nobody is paying attention, and nobody does anything about it. It's like a free for all. There is no control."

Another parent explained, "I said, 'Why is there so much distractions,' and she said, 'Because she's had nothing but As the whole time she has been here but she said she's learning...I mean, she is individually being addressed to her needs. She finds the classroom extremely distracting. Because if you're not on board with trying to learn and trying to be challenged, you are getting lost in the back, and the teachers aren't doing anything to address, and I don't know. It's definitely not -- I don't think one group of students, that the distraction is going on, but I'm sure their lack of interest in learning is helping with being distracting, you know, if the students aren't interested in what they are learning, they are going to occupy their time.'" Another parent attributed the problem of distractions and chaos in the classroom to school and class size. "I think the problem can be the amount of students this school has. Maybe it's the number of students in each class."

**Making learning fun.** Accountability was also discussed in terms of how teachers need to make the learning fun. "They just make learning fun and worth it."

"Something that is important for the teachers to learn is how to keep the student's attention."

When asked how they would describe a best teacher, one student said, “I feel like the best teacher for me is the funny one. When they teach they can be funny sometimes, like not boring. When someone is boring, first thing they are going to ditch because, ‘This guy is so boring.’ They are going to ditch. If it’s funny they aren’t even going to want to ditch...A funny teacher is always, like, funny. Like you get him sometimes. Like he is acting like your friend. You get him. You could talk to him; like I talk to my Aurora Lights teacher. He is funny. I could talk to him about stuff, and they won’t bother me like talking to a boring teacher.”

In trying to describe the teacher who is fun, another student explained, “They keep you moving on so you don’t fall asleep in their class. So some people aren’t funny. I’m trying to describe funny. It would be like they try and make the subject interesting? Like history, history is boring, and you are reading and reading. My history teacher, actually he is pretty funny. So I’ll actually learn from him because he can be funny. Like he could talk to us more like a friend than a teacher because he says funny stuff, like the war.”

They have to have fun projects to, like, catch our attention. Like if they say write a report about this and this and that and have a picture, something -- I mean, that isn’t going to caught my attention. It has to be something like I’ll write a report, but then they have to make something, or like she says they have to write it down to -- in a way to see that it’s fun; like everybody has a different style so their way of fun. They are actually trying to engage with the student and make it entertaining but not to the point that it’s a show, just to be there and watch.

***Being passionate for subject and to teach.*** The participants explained that part of making the learning fun is for teachers to be passionate about the subject they teach and for teaching itself. “Teachers can improve their teaching skills and the way they communicate with students.” “There are some teachers that go on to teaching; that they want to help, and they are not just here

for the money. Some of us parents, we just want teachers that love their profession. That they love that their students are getting better, and some teachers are just here to get their check every month.” “I think one of the thing the teachers -- they need more passion of what they are doing.”

A student said, “Back to the ideal teacher, I just thought of something. I just recently started a civics class, and I have always hated history, but this teacher, she loves what she is teaching. She loves to teach, and that made me focus, and I sat there the first day of class, and I said, ‘I’m going to love this class,’ and it’s the fourth day I think, and I love it. I learned more in these five days because my teachers were just not like that.” Another student added, “My math teacher, I am -- Me and math don’t get along, but she loves math, and she loves to teach. She loves her students and learning, and I actually go in there and ask for help, and I’ve never done that with any of my other math teachers. So I spent all of my lunch hours there just trying to get better because of how good she teaches, how much she loves to help.

### **Conclusion**

The evidence showed that the story of Latino/Hispanic students at Hinkley High School was one of change over time. Tensions or differences were evident between the Latino/Hispanic students, their parents, and school administrators on one hand and at least some teachers on the other hand. The key to future change was in the classroom. In order to change the achievement and discipline outcomes for these students, profound changes needed to be made in classrooms. Finally, based on the evidence, recommendations for the second year of the project were made.

**Change.** The story of Latino/Hispanic students’ experiences at Hinkley High School was interwoven with the changes that occurred over the prior five years. Five years prior the culture of the school was one of Latino/Hispanic students wearing gang colors and apparel to school and skipping or ditching classes and hanging out in the hallways and common areas. The results were

low academic achievement and disproportionate representation in discipline processes in terms of frequency and severity. Often these students were dropping out of school or being expelled and failing to graduate from high school.

The school mission was focused on all students succeeding and failure being unacceptable. As a result, the frequency with which Latino/Hispanic students skipped or ditched class diminished. Academic achievement for these students improved, and discipline remained a problem, particularly for Latino/Hispanic boys, although the frequency had gone down. Overall the evidence showed educational outcomes for Latino/Hispanic students at Hinkley High School had improved.

However, as good as the current climate at Hinkley High School was for Latino/Hispanic students, it was not good enough. These students and their parents wanted better relationships between the students and their teachers, higher expectations, and greater appreciation for their bilingual and bicultural capabilities. Although the school had adopted a number of interventions to try to improve Latino/Hispanic student outcomes, there was room for improvement. That is where the Culture of Care pilot project fit in. This project built upon the capacities developed with other professional development activities to create an umbrella for guiding the school into a future where Latino/Hispanic students could flourish in a learning community that allowed them to be who and what they are.

**Tensions.** However, there were tensions between teachers and administration. The evidence revealed that this tension may well have been based on the differences in how Latino/Hispanic students, their parents, and administrators on one hand and teachers on the other hand viewed the role of the teachers as the most important influence on the success of these students at school. Underlying this tension were deficit theorizing and agency.

Latino/Hispanic students, their parents, and administrators believed that these students could do well in school and go on to college or university. They also believed that their high school teachers could make a difference. The key to making a difference was creating relationships where teachers cared about these students as culturally located individuals as well as caring for their learning.

However, the teachers, at least some of the teachers, appeared to believe that they were unable to make a difference in the educational outcomes of these students because they came from homes that were deficient in educational expectations and preparedness. As a result, they expected these students to not engage in school and likely drop out or be expelled. Furthermore, these differences resulted in tension between the expectations of administration and what some teachers believed these students were capable of doing.

**Classrooms.** As a result of these tensions, changes were primarily being made outside of the classrooms but not inside all of the classrooms. Relationships between Latino/Hispanic students and their teachers in the classrooms were inconsistent. Low expectations for these students resulted in tracking them into remedial courses and vocational classes. These expectations were based on English language capability rather than content knowledge. As a result, these students either dropped out of school or were underprepared for successful admission and completion of college or university.

Additionally, because some of these teachers lacked the capacity to heal the harm to relationships that resulted when wrongdoing and conflict occurred in the classroom, Latino/Hispanic students, particularly boys, were more often referred out of the learning environment to an administrator to be punished. As a result of these referrals, these students were being denied the right to be literate because they were simply not present when and where the

learning was occurring. This phenomenon in and of itself was perhaps the greatest cause for why Latino/Hispanic students were dropping out of school and ending up in a spiral of involvement with social services or in the school-to-prison pipeline.

Finally, Latino/Hispanic students at Hinkley High School were not valued for being bilingual and bicultural. Moreover, as they became more proficient in English and assimilated into the culture of the United States, they developed into global citizens because they were able to speak two of the three major languages spoken in the world and lived in a multicultural environment. To create a culturally sustainable pedagogy in classrooms, these students needed to be valued as being bilingual and bicultural and encouraged to bring their language and culture to every classroom.

**Recommendations.** Based on the findings emerging analysis of the data that were collected, the following recommendations were made. Creating a Culture of Care at Hinkley High School will require deliberate actions on the part of every person who belongs to the school community. In order to continue bringing about the profound change that is required to meet the needs and expectations of Latino/Hispanic students and their parents, to reduce the tensions that exist at Hinkley High School, and to focus on bringing these changes to the classroom, these recommendations were made:

- Focusing on building the capacity of teachers and their students to respond to wrongdoing and conflict in the classroom in such a way as addresses the harm that results to relationships. This can best be accomplished by training teachers and students about the restorative justice practices of restorative conversations and talking circles. As a result referrals can be greatly reduced and hopefully eliminated so that Latino/Hispanic students can spend most of their time in school learning.

- Revising the discipline policy at Hinkley High School to support restorative justice practices as the first option for responding to wrongdoing and conflict and discouraging the use of referrals by teachers. A cadre of people was trained at the end of the 2011-2012 school year in how to train others in these skills. These trainers can help build the capacity of students, their parents, teachers, staff, and administrators in the use of these practices based on the principles of restorative justice.
- Continuing the Culture of Care Research and Professional Development project in the 2012-2013 school year. In addition to continue working with the 15 teachers who participated in the project in the 2011-2012 school year and to invite more teachers to participate in the project for the upcoming school year. In this way, over time, the culture of the school will likely change, and educational outcomes for Latino/Hispanic students will improve.

### **2012-2013 - Capacity Building**

Capacity building was the focus for the second year of work at Hinkley High School. What was learned from the needs assessment the first year, primarily through the voices of the Latino/Hispanic students and their parents, was the basis for building the capacity of the educators at Hinkley High School.

**Restorative Justice Professional Development Training.** Immediately after the 2011-2012 school year ended, restorative justice professional development training was held for 12 educators. This training was held at the request of the Hispanic parents and funded by a grant obtained by these parents. Ten of the educators participating in the training were from Hinkley High School, with one of these participants being a parent liaison at the school. Two of the educators were from nearby East Middle School. Restorative Justice practices were shared with

members of the school community, including students, their parents, teachers, administrators, staff, and community members, and an observation and a self-assessment tool were introduced. In addition, monthly meetings were held with the Equity Team.

**Culture of Care Observation Tool.** In the 2011-2012 school year counselors were asked to do the initial teacher observations and provide feedback using the Culture of Care Observation Tool. However, this process was not successful because the counselors did not have time to do the observations and provide feedback individually to teachers.

So in the 2012-2013 school year, the research team taught members of the Equity Team how to use this observation tool. Teachers on the team were both observed and conducted observations. Then the Equity Team met to debrief and analyze the data collected. Feedback was provided to faculty either in small groups or as a whole.

**Culture of Care Teacher Self-Assessment Tool.** Also during the 2012-2013 school year the Culture of Care Teacher Self Assessment Tool was created by the research team and introduced to the Equity Team. This tool was housed in Google Forms so teachers could complete the survey with anonymity. After teachers completed the survey, data were analyzed and the results shared with members of the Equity Team.

## **2013-2014 - Sustainability**

Sustainability was the focus for the third year of work at Hinkley High School. The idea was to sustain the capacities built in the second year, particularly those capacities that legitimated the voices of the Latino/Hispanic students and their parents that were gathered in the first year of the pilot project.

Supported by the research team, the Hinkley High School Equity Team initiated the process of conducting Equity in Action Walk Throughs using the Culture of Care Observation Tool that was introduced during the prior school year. After the observations were held, a debriefing session was held. The Large Group Discussion resulted in the identification of strengths and successes and next steps. As the participants left the debriefing session they were asked to write on post it notes what was in their head, on their heart, and what they wanted to put into action based on what they had just learned (feet).

In addition, Restorative Justice Training was facilitated with students, parents, teachers, administrators, and community members, under the direction of Dean of Students Bonnie Martinez. In particular, the use of Talking Circles for resolving conflicts and responding to problems became used widespread both inside and outside of the classroom. In fact, the use of Restorative Justice practices at Hinkley High School became so widely known that they were highlighted on the PBS Newshour on February 20, 2014. The program can be viewed at this link. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g8\\_94O4ExSA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g8_94O4ExSA).

During this project, the researchers wrote and submitted two articles that were published in peer-reviewed journals. One article was entitled, A story legitimating the voices of Latino/Hispanic students and their parents: Creating a restorative justice response to wrongdoing

and conflict in schools. This article appeared in *Equity and Excellence in Education*. This journal is a top ranked journal in the field of education in the area of equity. As this report was being written, word was received that the article was accepted for publication and will be published soon. The reference for the article is:

Cavanagh, T., Vigil, P., & Garcia, E. (in press). A story legitimating the voices of

Latino/Hispanic students and their parents: Creating a restorative justice response to wrongdoing and conflict in schools. *Equity and Excellence in Education*. doi: 10.1080/10665684.2014.958966.

The second article was entitled Developing peacemakers in the classroom: An alternative discourse in a culture of war and violence and appeared in *Peace Studies Journal*. The reference for the article is:

Vigil, P. M., Cavanagh, T., & Garcia, E. (2013). Developing peacemakers in the classroom: An alternative discourse in a culture of war and violence. *Peace Studies Journal*, 6(1), 79-91.

## Results

Some of the quantitative results achieved during the pilot project are reported. While a statistically significant cause and effect relationship cannot be made between this project and the results discussed here, administrators at Hinkley High School make this connection. We offer the following results in that light.

The primary goal of this pilot project was to improve the amount of time Latino/Hispanic students spent in the classroom learning. The objective was to build the capacity of students and teachers at the school to respond appropriately to wrongdoing and conflict in the classroom so that the number of referrals would decrease. A decrease in the number of referrals would indicate that students with discipline issues, who were traditionally referred to discipline experts outside the classroom for the administration of punishment, were being kept in the classroom and as a result having increased time for learning.

Figure 1 demonstrates the effect of introducing restorative practices at Hinkley High School. Ten educators at the school were trained in how to use restorative justice practices in the spring of 2012. With the introduction of these practices in the 2012-2013 school year, the use of restorative justice practices increased, while disciplinary events decreased. However, while disciplinary events continued to decline in every area but controlled substances<sup>1</sup>, the use of restorative justice outside of the classroom also declined. The inference is that fewer referrals were being made of students regarding discipline issues to administrators outside the classroom as a result of building the capacity of teachers and students to respond to wrongdoing and conflict in the classroom using restorative justice practices.

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<sup>1</sup> The legalization of marijuana in Colorado occurred during the 2013-2014 school year.

Figure 1. Disciplinary Events at Hinkley High School

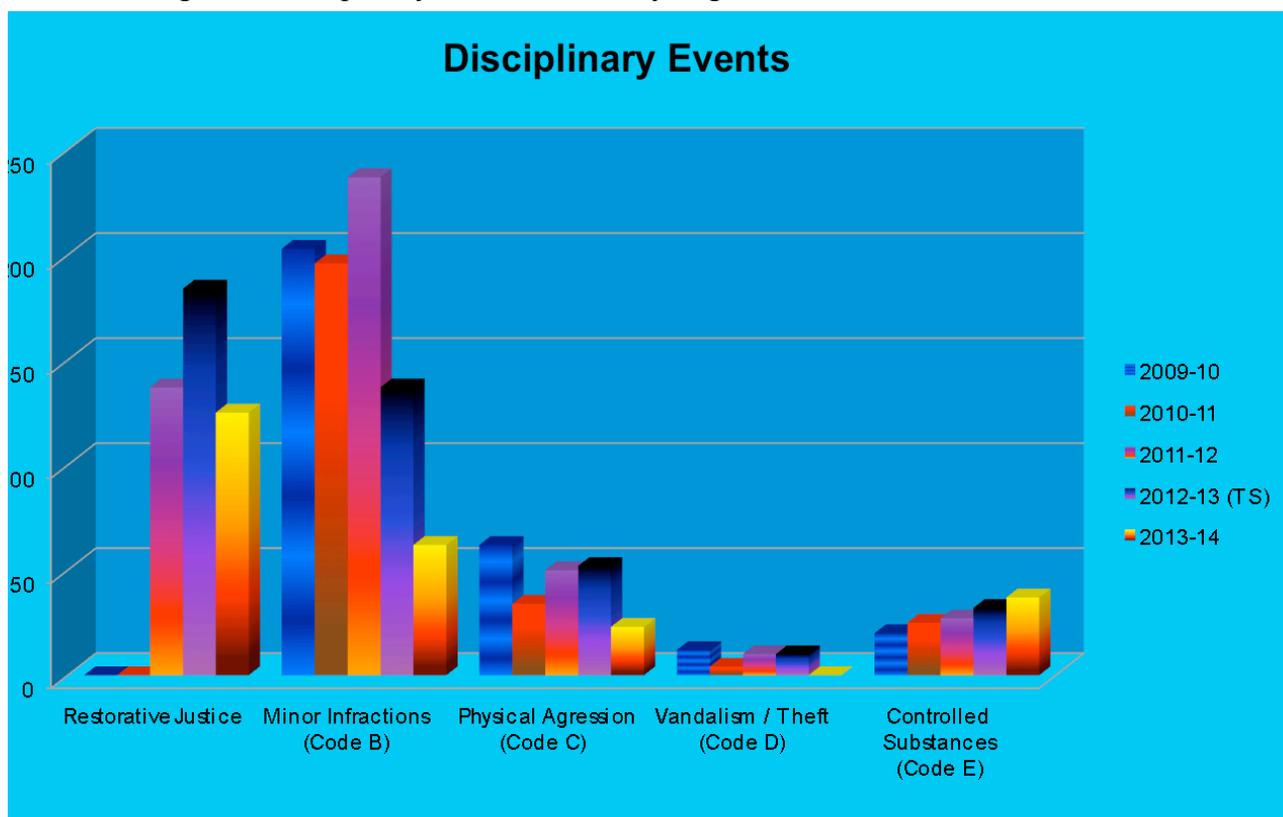


Figure 1. The number of restorative justice and traditional disciplinary events at Hinkley High School from 2009-2014.

Since Colorado State University funded this pilot project, there was also interest in how this pilot project might have affected graduation rates. The university sponsored this pilot project based on the idea that a change in the culture at Hinkley High School might result in more Latino/Hispanic students graduating from high school and being eligible to attend a university.

At the same time as referrals declined, the graduation rate increased. Figure 2 demonstrates how the graduation rate improved from about 65% the year before the Culture of Care was introduced at Hinkley High School to nearly 80% by the end of the 2012-2013 school year.

Figure 2. Hinkley High School Graduation Rate

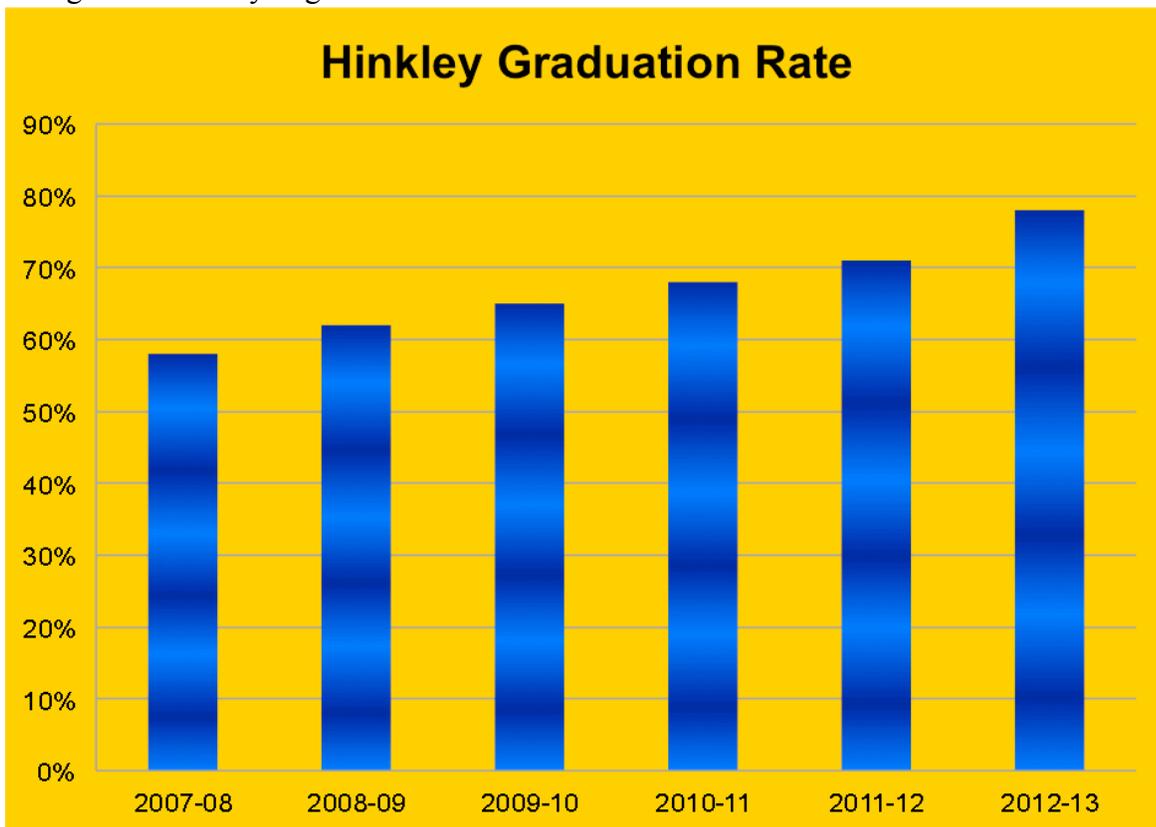


Figure 2. The graduation rate by percentage of students graduating from Hinkley High School from 2007 through 2013.

## **Conclusions**

The Culture of Care research and professional development project was conducted as a pilot project. Therefore, the emphasis on these conclusions is on what lessons were learned through this three-year project that will help in implementing the project at other schools in the future.

When the project was proposed, funding for three years was requested from Colorado State University and a commitment from Hinkley High School for the same period of time was also requested. We learned that three years was enough time to change the culture of this school. Further, we learned that those three years seemed to fall into three stages: a) needs assessment, b) capacity building, and c) sustainability. One stage flowed naturally into the next.

These stages were supported by the participation of Latino/Hispanic students and their parents. In the first year the focus was on legitimating their voices (Bishop, 2005; Bishop & Glynn, 1999). Focus group interviews were used to create “testimonios” (Gutierrez, 2008) to legitimate the experiences of these children in school in terms of what it was like to be Latino/Hispanic at Hinkley High School. The second year continued the process by activating the voices of these students and their parents (Freire, 2005). The findings from typological and inductive analysis (Hatch, 2002) of the focus group interview data created the framework for professional development of teachers during the second year in order to build their capacity to engage with these students in a culturally relevant manner (Buehler, Dallavis, & Haviland, 2009;

Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995) and move away from deficit-based pedagogies (Valencia, 2010). In the third year a culturally sustainable pedagogy was created at Hinkley High School that supported the Latino/Hispanic students and their families by building upon the cultural and linguistic capacities they brought with them to school and at the same time providing these students and their families with access to competencies valued by the dominant culture in the United States.

Two research articles were published during this project that helped to frame and support our work. Gregory, Skiba, and Noguera (2010) published an article sharing the results of research that showed that the achievement gap and the discipline gap are linked and are race based. This research supported our belief that a person cannot talk about achievement of ethnically diverse students without talking about discipline and vice versa. Also the two gaps cannot be discussed without acknowledging the issue of race. That idea was important to us because we found often teachers failed to take agency in making a difference for their students of color because they came from homes of poverty. That position led these educators to focus on deficit theorizing about these students (Valencia, 2010).

The second article was published by Winn and Behizadeh (2011). These researchers explained that the right to learn is a human right, and that educators are obligated to provide as much time as possible for students to learn in the classroom. This article supported our focus on deducting referrals in order that ethnically diverse students could spend time learning in the classroom rather than being punished through detentions, suspensions, and expulsions.

During the time that this pilot project was being conducted two educational policy shifts occurred that had a direct impact on our work. On August 1, 2012 the Colorado legislature passed the Colorado School Discipline Bill, which was Senate Bill 12-046, Amended to House

Bill 12-1345. This legislation directed schools to quit using zero tolerance approaches to discipline and instead to use alternatives like restorative justice. Then on January 8, 2014, the United States Department of Education issued the new Nondiscriminatory Administration of School Discipline policy in collaboration with the U.S. Department of Justice.

This policy adopted the same approach as the Colorado legislation and in addition focused on reducing the disproportionate application of discipline on students of color.

At the same time the Colorado policy was adopted, the Ministry of Education in New Zealand published guidelines for evidence-based restorative practices (Corrigan, 2012a, 2012b). These guidelines were the conceptual framework for the restorative justice training. Here is an overview of those guidelines.

The Seven Restorative Practices (RPs) all sit within the school-wide framework of “Positive Behaviour for Learning”. Each RP requires a culturally responsive approach with the school’s student, teacher and parent community.

1. Restorative Basics - Pumanawatanga. It’s about attitude: doing school “with” students. Right and inclusive relationships across the school, teachers’ positioning and theorising. All staff.
2. Community Circles / Wā rino. Structured circles with students to build connectedness and learning intentions. All teaching staff.
3. Collegial Relationships At Work. Restorative tools are used to build and maintain a healthy staff community. Leaders and all staff.
4. Restorative Language and Conversations. Affective statements, theory of shame and reintegration, scripted problem solving conversations. All staff.

5. Brief Restorative Interventions. Referral-based restorative problem solving tools for deans, pastoral and senior management staff.

6. Classroom Conference Circles. Structured problem solving circles for large groups of students and their teachers. Some expert staff only.

7. Restorative Conferences / Hui Whakatika. Formal conferences to address specific incidents of serious harm. Some expert staff only.

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