Reform Through a Student Lens: The Experience of Latino Students in an International Baccalaureate Diploma Program in Chicago

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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

REFORM THROUGH A STUDENT LENS:
THE EXPERIENCE OF LATINO/A STUDENTS IN AN
INTERNATIONAL BACCALAUREATE DIPLOMA PROGRAM IN CHICAGO

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION
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BY
SANDRA F. ARREGUIN
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS
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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I need to begin by thanking my parents – Francisco Arreguín and María de la Cruz Medina. My journey began with these two amazing people over three decades ago when together we left our beloved birthplace to pursue a dream. My parents sacrificed family, home, and language, and in exchange I was blessed with myriad opportunities most of which they never imagined, including this dissertation. They taught me that life is about happiness, laughter, and hard work – a lot of it. Because of my parents, I know that I am not above doing any type of job and that humility and respect are what define a truly educated person. My parents were my first teachers.

Another steadfast figure in my life is my brother, Nelson. With his birth I automatically gained big sister status, also known as reluctant role model. As much as I disliked the responsibility imposed by my position in the birth order, I learned that my actions influence others, young people are always watching you, and that one of the most humble acts is to care for and mentor another; lessons that would serve me later in life. I am grateful that Nelson realized at an early age he was stuck with me and had no choice but to love and support me. I thank my brother for always being my biggest cheerleader and for believing in me.

I have been lucky to spend the last 13 years of my life, married to my partner and cómplice, Roberto Montoya. We were kids when we started dating, but this was already a goal of mine. He could have run away when I announced my intention to be a doctor one
day, but instead he stuck by me and supported me through all of my educational endeavors. This dissertation was my dream, not his, yet he took the journey with me and sacrificed much, which included reimagining his life. For this and many, many, many other things, I will be eternally grateful. With Roberto, en la calle codo a codo somos mucho más que dos.

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For my husband, Tito
I write to record what others erase when I speak, to rewrite the stories others have miswritten about me, about you.

—Gloria Anzaldúa
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ABSTRACT

This dissertation is a study of Latinos participating in the International Baccalaureate Diploma Program in Chicago. Phenomenological interview techniques were used to explore the experiences and perceptions of Latino students in IB. By looking at Latino/a students separately, the study captured the strengths, challenges, and needs unique to this group, which will inform the future of this rapidly growing curriculum reform effort.
CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

Oftentimes in education there seems to be a presumption that anything that is called a reform will automatically improve schools. A notion exists that any change will be good change because our schools just need so much work. On the opposite end of the spectrum is the here we go again attitude of educators that have been in the system long enough to see curriculum reforms come and go, some new and some old with jazzier names. History and experience have taught us that curriculum reform can lead to positive or negative consequences in schools and that it is even possible for both outcomes to result from the same reform effort (Kliebard, 2002; Payne, 2008).

Another valuable lesson is that the relationship between curriculum reform and school improvement can initially be vague or nonexistent. Although it may be intuitive to believe that school improvement is the impetus for curriculum reform, this is not always the case. Political and social interests and movements have an enormous influence on curriculum reforms (Kliebard, 2002; Oakes, 2005). Interestingly, regardless of what motivates a reform, schools, students, and teachers experience the results of the action for years to come whether or not it leads to school improvement. Due to this, curriculum reform and school improvement are tied to each other by default even when a clear connection is missing at the beginning of the reform cycle.
For these reasons, it is important to continually observe programs that are introduced as reforms to ensure that they are serving the needs of our students. From an equity perspective, this is critical because throughout history several reforms, such as the tracking of students and standardized testing, have led to inequities in education that have had deleterious effects on students of color and students of low socioeconomic status (Darling-Hammond, 1997; La Roche & Shriberg, 2004; Latino Policy Forum, 2012a; Oakes, 2005; Payne, 2008). Specifically, Latinos have been the targets of a multitude of educational reforms in the United States with positive and negative outcomes (Trueba & Bartolome, 1997). As a matter of fact, Gándara (2004) reminds us “… there is scant evidence on the effects of these efforts [school reforms] for increasing the incidence of high achievement among Latino students” (p. 32). It is unjust and unacceptable to affect entire groups without knowing the results of a treatment due to lack of study.

Among the reforms that need to be continuously monitored are those that serve gifted and talented students to ensure that the programs are meeting the needs of those participating in them (Callahan, 1985). An example of one such reform is the International Baccalaureate Diploma Program (IB DP). Although IB was not originally intended to be a gifted program, some have defended it as a program that is highly appropriate for gifted and talented youth (Poelzer & Feldhusen, 1997; Tookey, 1999/2000) and in recent years, the IB DP has become a popular option for gifted students in U.S. high schools (Hertberg-Davis, Callahan, & Kyburg, 2006). Large urban cities are using IB as a reform model to address some of the issues faced by students of diverse backgrounds, including the lack of access to a rigorous curriculum, college-level classes, and highly-qualified teachers (Kyburg, Hertberg-Davis, & Callahan, 2007;
Mayer, 2008). The hope is that IB will provide these students with opportunities that will lead to their academic success and simultaneously narrow the achievement gap (Mayer, 2008).

One large school district that is placing its bets on IB as a reform is Chicago. The third largest district in the country established 13 high school IB programs in the late nineties and recently opened 10 new high school programs in the fall of 2013 (Chicago Public Schools [CPS], 2012a). Although there is data to support the success of IB in Chicago (Coca et al., 2012; Roderick, Nagaoka, Coca, & Moeller, 2009; Saavedra, 2011), researchers also recognize some challenges faced by students who are low-income and racial/ethnic minorities (Coca et al., 2012; Roderick et al., 2009).

This dissertation will continue the exploration of IB high school program in Chicago. Even though studies with a Chicago focus have been completed, the research on how well reform programs, like IB, serve gifted students from diverse and disadvantaged backgrounds is limited (Gándara, 2005; Kyburg et al., 2007). Additionally, the current study will contribute to the research by focusing on one group of students: Latinos. Besides the fact that Latinos are the fastest growing population in the United States (United States [U.S.] Census Bureau, 2010), in Chicago there is a slight overrepresentation of Latino students in the high school IB programs (Coca et al., 2012; Roderick et al., 2009). The benefit of looking at Latinos separately is the possibility of capturing challenges unique to this group. This information could provide valuable input to CPS decision-makers and administrators as they monitor the established and recently added IB high school programs.
Background for the Study

In high schools, reform strategies often focus on increasing college access and success for secondary students through rigorous curriculum programs, such as the IB program (Roderick et al., 2009), an internationally recognized program that aims to prepare students for collegiate studies. Founded in 1968 in Europe, the initial purpose of IB was to ensure that schools around the world could offer a standardized, college preparatory curriculum for the sons and daughters of diplomats, ambassadors, foreign ministers, and business professionals. Graduating from an IB program offered the guarantee that a student had participated in a program that had prepared her for college entrance anywhere in the world (International Baccalaureate Organization [IBO], 2005-2012a; Poelzer & Feldhusen, 1997).

IB is comprised of three educational programs. First there is the Primary Years Program (PYP), which addresses the needs of children ages 3-11. Next is the Middle Years Program (MYP) for students between 11-16 years old, and finally the Diploma Program (DP) for those ages 16-19. The DP is the one implemented at the high school level during the 11th and 12th grades. In order to receive an IB diploma, students must fulfill specific DP requirements. These requirements include writing an extended essay, which is a 4,000-word research paper on a topic chosen by the student. Students also need to enroll and pass a course titled “Theory of Knowledge” (TOK). The purpose of this course is to have students explore knowledge in its various forms and types. Students study perception, emotion, language, and reason via the scientific, artistic, mathematical, and historical mediums (IBO, 2010a). The Director General of IB, Alexander Peterson (1972) explained that the TOK course was about “learning to think.”
In addition to the TOK, the IB DP requires students to be actively involved in their community through the Creativity, Action, and Service (CAS) component by committing to social or aesthetic activities (Tarc, 2009). This is similar to service learning in that students engage in real-life activities outside of the classroom for the benefit of their community. Finally, students have to pass exams in the following six subject groups: Studies in Language and Literature, Language Acquisition, Individuals and Societies, Sciences, Mathematics, and The Arts (IBO, 2014).

Globally, IB can be seen in 3,483 schools in 144 different countries (IBO, 2005-2012b). No longer is the program targeted only to the children of politicians and business professionals. As a result of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation signed in 2001 by then President George W. Bush, there has been a push in the education world to implement reforms that promise to deliver measurable, successful outcomes in a variety of contexts (Borman, Hewes, Overman, & Brown, 2005). Across the U.S., school districts wanting to comply with NCLB have introduced the IB program as a solution to increase academic rigor and performance in American schools (Kyburg et al., 2007).

In addition to NCLB, the current administration under President Barack Obama has also pushed educational initiatives that encourage the adoption of rigorous curriculum programs, such as IB. In 2009-2010 the IBO put out a publication for states in which they characterize their program as the most viable option for school districts under existing reform strategies. This publication titled, *The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA): Capitalize on Federal Education Funding Opportunities with the International Baccalaureate (IB)*, explains ARRA funding as well as the Race to the Top (RTT) funding and gives details on how IB meets the ARRA and RTT priorities. The document
includes quotations by President Obama and his secretary of education, Arne Duncan. Also, it is replete with bold statements and headings, such as “The US Department of Education recommends IB as a way to promote rigorous standards and assessments under ARRA” (p. 12). With a zeitgeist focused on school reform and an endorsement from the federal government, it is no wonder that IB has grown in popularity in the U.S.

In the state of Illinois IB programs grew during the 1990s, but it was not until after 1999 that the growth became significant. Chicago sponsors 93% of all IB schools in the state (IBO, 2010b). The push for IB as a reform in Chicago began with former CPS chief executive officer, Paul Vallas who served from 1995 to 2001. In 1997, two years after becoming CEO, Vallas proposed the opening of the IB DP in neighborhood high schools. For almost two decades Lincoln Park High School was the single provider of IB curriculum at the secondary level. During his tenure, Vallas added 12 more IB DP programs in addition to the one at Lincoln Park High School (Schlesinger, 2012).

Today the IB DP continues to grow in Chicago thanks to evidence of the success of the IB DP as a reform for high school students in this same city (Coca et al., 2012; Roderick et al., 2009; Saavedra, 2011). As a result of these favorable studies, on March 23, 2012, the mayor of Chicago, Rahm Emanuel and then CPS CEO, Jean-Claude Brizard announced that 10 more IB programs would be opening in neighborhood high schools for the 2013-2014 school year (CPS, 2012a). The immediate response to the research was expansion, but even though these studies yield very positive information regarding the IB DP in Chicago, they also bring up concerns.

Using both quantitative and qualitative methods, a study sponsored by the Consortium on Chicago School Research at the University of Chicago (Roderick et al.,
2009) found that after examining the demographic characteristics and college qualifications of CPS students in academically advanced programs (IB, Honors/Advanced Placement [AP], and selective enrollment), IB students in Chicago graduate with a very high grade point average (GPA), especially those in the Lincoln Park High School IB program whose average GPA of 4.5 surpasses that of all other students in academically advanced programs in the city. Another interesting finding is that 41% of IB students in Chicago have access to selective and very selective colleges. Paradoxically, IB students in Chicago are less likely to enroll in college than students in other academically advanced programs, such as Advanced Placement and selective enrollment high schools.

This phenomenon forces one to question how successful a college preparatory program such as IB truly is when students are not pursuing post-secondary education. It is especially important to keep this in mind when we consider that IB students are more likely to be demographically similar to other CPS students. Most IB DP students are African-American or Latino with the majority identifying as Latino (Coca et al., 2012).

The successes and challenges of Latino students in the IB DP are significant and warrant further exploration. When it comes to education, a policy brief from the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) (AFT, 2004) informs us “…educational outcomes for Latinos have not improved dramatically in the last 30 years” (p. 2). Furthermore, this policy brief states that high school dropout rates are the highest among Latinos, and also that the Latino community has the lowest percentage of bachelor’s degree graduates (16%) below that of Whites (37%) and African-Americans (21%). When it comes to gifted education, Latino students have been underrepresented in these
programs (Gándara, 2004, 2005). In the case of the IB DP in Chicago the opposite is true. Recent examinations demonstrate that it serves a high number of Latino students and that for the most part it is working (Coca et al., 2012; Roderick et al., 2009). At a time when more IB DP programs are scheduled for implementation, it is necessary to find out how the IB DP program in Chicago is meeting the unique needs of its Latino students and how it can improve to better serve this demographic.

This investigation will spotlight the voice of Latino students. So often the voices of all students are missing from educational reform research. As McHatton, Shaunessy, Hughes, Brice, and Ratliff (2007) point out, “... attempts to increase academic achievement of diverse students rarely include the voices of the very students the system is charged with serving” (p. 12). This study will provide a venue for Latino students so that they can express whether or not the IB DP program that is meant to serve them is meeting their needs. It will inform educators and policy makers by validating or putting into question certain reform practices.

**Research Questions**

1. How do Latino/a students in an urban setting make meaning out of their experiences in an IB DP program?
   a. What are Latino/a students’ long-term goals and plans and how does IB fit into their visions?
   b. How do Latino/a students perceive themselves academically, linguistically, and socially and how does IB contribute to their perceptions of self?
2. What beliefs do Latino/a students hold about how the IB DP at their school acknowledges their academic, linguistic, and social needs to ensure that they are college and career ready?
   a. What elements of the IB program do Latino/a students identify as promoting their academic, linguistic, and social success?
   b. What elements of the IB program do Latino/a students identify as ineffective in promoting their academic, linguistic, and social success?
   c. How do Latino/a students think the IB program could better promote their academic, linguistic, and social success?

**Significance of the Study**

Although research has been done on diverse urban high school students in IB DP programs, this study will concentrate on a specific population of students. This differs from other studies that treat ethnic/racial minorities as a homogeneous group. The sample of students will be drawn from Chicago high schools serving Latino students. This is significant given the increase in the number of Latinos living in the U.S. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2006), Latinos comprised 4.7% of the population in 1970, while in 2006 the percentage of Latinos living in the U.S. grew to 14.8%. The 2010 Census revealed that Latinos already make up 16% of the population. Census projections estimate that by the year 2050, the population of Latinos in the U.S. will be 24.4%. The U.S. experienced a 43% population growth of Latinos between the years 2000 and 2010 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

Given the rapid growth of the Latino population, it is imperative that educators concern themselves with the education of Latino students. Examining Latinos separately
will contribute to the research on Latino education. President Obama (2010) summarized why the education of Latinos is of the utmost importance in his remarks at the signing of the renewal of the White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanics:

Today, Latinos make up the largest minority group in America’s schools – more than one in five students overall – and they face challenges of monumental proportions.

Latino students are more likely to attend our lowest performing schools, more likely to learn in larger class sizes, more likely to drop out at higher rates. . . . Only about half graduate on time from high school. And those who do make it to college often find themselves underprepared for its rigors. . . . America has fallen from first to ninth in college completion rates for all our students.

Now, this is not just a Latino problem; this is an American problem. We’ve got to solve it because if we allow these trends to continue, it won’t be one community that falls behind – we will all fall behind together. (quoted in Winning the Future: Improving Education for the Latino Community, p. 20)

The opening of 10 new IB DP programs in Chicago also makes this investigation significant. This is especially true because 5 of these programs will be wall-to-wall IB high schools. This means that there will be an open enrollment for those living in the neighborhood and that all students in the school will participate in the IB program.

According to a CPS press release,

A wall-to-wall IB school is located in an existing neighborhood and maintains its open enrollment. Every incoming freshman is enrolled in courses taught using the IB Middle Years Programme framework. At the completion of the year, students can choose to enroll in either the full Diploma Programme, which contains the most rigorous course load, opts for the IB certificate where students can take one or more classes, pursue an IB career related certificate or fulfill an IB core requirement. With these options, all students at every wall-to-wall IB school touch the IB Programme. (CPS, 2012b, para. 5)

A goal of this research is to provide insight into the successful strategies and principles as perceived by students of IB DP programs to replicate them for other Latino
IB DP students, and perhaps even other educational programs with Latino students. Another objective is to find out what is not working for Latino students. If there are problems that Latino/a students are encountering in the IB DP program, the first step is to identify them. In order to problem solve, we must first know what the issues are. It is important to point out that Latino/a students in this study are not a homogeneous group, but the variety of experiences will better identify ways to achieve success in the IB program. This study could also possibly contribute to the implementation and monitoring of the IB DP programs opened in CPS as recently as 2014.

**Considerations of the Study**

The method used for this study will be phenomenological. As a result, this will pose a risk to the generalizability of the research because it will detail the experience of only one specific group of Latino students in IB attending one particular school in Chicago. On the other hand, this dissertation will provide descriptive cases to draw upon that can be used as a basis for conducting future research, especially when working with groups of racially/ethnically-diverse students living in large, urban areas. Furthermore, I would argue that *naturalistic generalizations* might result from the research. Naturalistic generalizations allow readers to engage with the data so that they build on their own personal understandings in order to expand their knowledge and then apply it to their work (Stake & Trumbull, 1982).

Another consideration to take into account is my possible shared experience with the participants of this study. First of all, I am a graduate of a CPS selective enrollment high school and a Latina. The issues that the Latino students in the IB DP face may be similar to those that I have confronted throughout my educational career. My challenge
will be to not make assumptions based on similar experiences with the students that I interview. At the same time, our parallel lives may make it easier for students to relate to me and for us to develop a trusting relationship, which I hope will encourage participants of the study to be more open about their experiences. I believe it will also help students to know that I am a native Spanish-speaker therefore they will be able to speak to me in the language with which they feel more comfortable or even both, if they, too, are Spanish-speakers.

Along this same vein, I was a CPS employee for the past nine years. Although I now work as an administrator in a suburban district, I was previously a CPS high school teacher and taught in an IB program. I received training to teach IB French and IB Spanish and attended IB in-service workshops. Needless to say, I am highly acquainted with the IB program. Due to my professional experience with IB, I possess a deep understanding of the curriculum and the mission and strategy of the IB DP. I am extremely familiar with the IB learner profile, which will help me develop interview questions aligned to the program. Also, I am comfortable with the websites and materials produced by IBO, including the Online Curriculum Centre and I am accustomed to the language, history, and rhetoric of the organization. All of this combined with my experience as a Latina student in CPS gives me access to insider knowledge and insights that another researcher without these characteristics might not be privy to or recognize. These same attributes are also what motivate me to develop and conduct a high-quality study that adheres to the highest ethical standards.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This section is divided into two major parts: the Literature Review and Theoretical Framework. The literature review is comprised of two topics: the International Baccalaureate program and Latinos in Education. I begin with a brief history of the International Baccalaureate (IB) program. A description of the program follows along with an in-depth explanation of the IB Diploma Program (DP). A summary of the research on student perceptions of IB, IB as a gifted program, and IB in diverse, urban settings, including Chicago will be provided. The review of Latinos in Education considers the challenges faced by Latinos in education and then considers the research on gifted, talented, and high-achieving Latino students. I conclude with the Theoretical Framework, which draws on Critical Theory and Critical Race Theory to explain Latino Critical Theory.

Literature Review

International Baccalaureate

Brief history of the International Baccalaureate Program. Although IB formed officially in 1968, there had been interest in Geneva as early as the 1920s to create an international baccalaureate program. At that time though, the proposal developed by the International School of Geneva did not advance. It would take until after the Second World War for this notion of an international education to gain momentum (Hill as cited in Tarc, 2009, p. 10). The IB movement was resuscitated during
the 1960s and not coincidentally. This was a time when there was an interest in promoting international relations due to the global tensions recently experienced during World War II and the Cold War. It made sense for IB to exist, not only to provide an education for the children of diplomats, but also to promote global citizenship. The economic globalization of the 1980s and 1990s along with the political ramifications of the post-9/11 era has fortified IB and the conversation around international education, the argument being that education must be international in order for students to compete and succeed in today’s global world (Tarc, 2009).

IB first gained momentum in the U.S. with the United Nations School of New York (UNIS), which was the first school in the U.S. out of a group of six to fully embrace IB in 1967. From then until recently the expansion of IB in the U.S. was fairly flat (Bunnell, 2011a; Tarc, 2009). In the last decade, though, the IB program has grown fairly quickly in this country both in terms of schools and students. With this growth has come several issues (Bunnell, 2009, 2011a, 2011b); the development of IB in the U.S. has lead to both positive and negative attention as well as contradictions. While Newsweek acknowledges high schools with International Baccalaureate Diploma Programs (IB DP) programs as some of the best in the country, conservative groups criticize IB for being “un-American” due to its international philosophy (Bunnell, 2009). Others view IB as elitist, yet IB programs are being implemented increasingly in large, diverse, urban districts (Bunnell, 2011a; CPS, 2012a).

The International Baccalaureate Program. IB is comprised of three programs of study that are targeted to students of different age ranges. Few schools in the U.S. and worldwide actually offer all three programs (Bunnell, 2009). These programs are the
Primary Years Program (PYP) for ages 3-12, the Middle Years Program (MYP) for ages 11-16, and the Diploma Program (DP) for ages 16-19. This non-profit international organization founded in Geneva, Switzerland, provides a curriculum that is qualified by universities worldwide. All IB programs include a written curriculum or framework, developmentally appropriate student assessments, professional development for teachers and support, authorization, and program evaluation for participating schools. IB defines itself as international, independent, research-based, and widely recognized educational program (IBO, 2013).

According to IBO (2013), the vision of IB is for students to be inquirers, knowledgeable, thinkers, communicators, principled, open-minded, caring, risk-takers, balanced, and reflective. These ten descriptors make up what IB refers to as the “learner profile.” It is a student-centered manifestation of the mission of IB:

The International Baccalaureate aims to develop inquiring, knowledgeable and caring young people who help to create a better and more peaceful world through intercultural understanding and respect.

To this end, the organization works with schools, governments and international organizations to develop challenging programs of international education and rigorous assessment.

These programs encourage students across the world to become active, compassionate and lifelong learners who understand that other people, with their differences, can also be right. (p. 2)

There are approximately 1,015,000 students in over 3,483 schools in 144 countries enrolled in IB around the world (2005-2012). The IB website lists the U.S. as the country with the most IB programs totaling 1,346. The runner-up, Canada, has 317 total IB programs (IBO, 2005-2012). The U.S. has 400% more IB programs than Canada.
A difference of 1,029 makes it quite easy to see that IB is most popular as a reform effort in the U.S.

**The International Baccalaureate Diploma Program.** The IB DP is seen in the U.S. in grades 11 (junior) and 12 (senior) of high school. In their guide for universities and colleges, IBO (2007) explains the IB DP as well as the requirements needed for attaining an IB diploma. In order to obtain an IB diploma, students take courses in 6 subjects (Studies in Language and Literature, Language Acquisition, Individuals and Societies, Sciences, Mathematics, and The Arts) of which at least three, but no more than four, are taken at the “higher level” meaning a recommended 240 hours of instruction. The remaining subjects are taken at the “standard level” which means that a student has received 150 hours of teaching in this area. The two-year curriculum of the IB DP is described as “rigorous” and “intellectually coherent” (p. 1).

In addition to the courses, students are assessed in each subject and receive a mark between 1 and 7 (lowest to highest). Up to three additional points may be earned for the results on both the Theory of Knowledge (TOK) and extended essay combined. To earn the diploma, students must accumulate a minimum of 24 points (the maximum is 45) and have completed the creativity, action, service component (CAS). Bilingual diplomas are available for students who study in a language other than their home language (IBO, 2007). An interesting fact to note is that these critical components of the IB DP – the classes, the TOK class, CAS, and the extended essay – have been present since its beginnings (Tarc, 2009).

The literature developed by IBO is not shy about touting its successes. For instance, in the guide for colleges and universities, IBO (2007) points out that SAT and
ACT scores of IB students are higher than those of the total population of testers. In terms of college acceptance, IBO states that in 2003 a higher percentage of IB diploma applicants were accepted into Harvard University, Yale University, Stanford University, and the University of California than all applicants. It is important to note that in an IBO literature review (n.d.), *Preparation for University Success*, the organization acknowledges that this data has not been analyzed to measure statistical significance. Overall, though, the findings reported are overwhelmingly positive. Even though IBO is a not-for-profit organization, there is a price to pay for all of this success. In 2010, the cost of the IB DP was US $9,600 per school plus an $896 fee per student (IBO, 2010a).

**Perceptions of students in the International Baccalaureate Diploma Program.** A common theme in the literature about the IB program and student perceptions is that the IB DP is a challenging program (Culross & Tarver, 2007; Hertberg et al., 2006; Vanderbrook, 2006) and that it can lead to high levels of stress and anxiety (Foust, Hertberg-Davis, & Callahan, 2009; Suldo, Shaunessy, Michalowski, & Shaffer, 2008; Taylor & Porath, 2006), more so than that experienced by their peers in general education programs (Suldo, Shaunessy, & Hardesty, 2008). IB DP students mention feeling tired, fatigued, and over-worked (Foust et al., 2009; Merrow, 1981). Furthermore, IB students in one study report feeling the need to sacrifice sleep in order to maintain academic success and a social life (Foust, Hertberg-Davis, & Callahan, 2008; Foust et al., 2009).

Another issue that is often cited is the rigidity of IB. Students point out that the IB curriculum does not leave much room for student choice (Hertberg-Davis et al., 2006; Kyburg et al., 2007; Merrow, 1981). On the other hand, IB students value the curriculum
and believe that it is preparing them for college (Culross & Tarver, 2007; Hertberg-Davis et al., 2006; Kyburg et al., 2007). In student interviews, IB participants even admitted that they enjoy the content of their IB courses because they feel intellectually stimulated (Hertberg-Davis et al., 2006; Merrow, 1981). Graduates of the IB program concur that the IB DP prepared them for college (Coca et al., 2012; Taylor & Porath, 2006). In a survey given to IB graduates of two high schools in British Columbia, Canada, 87.5% of respondents stated that they liked that their IB DP classes had been academically challenging. The same percentage of participants also felt better prepared for college courses thanks to IB (Taylor & Porath, 2006). In Chicago, Coca and colleagues (2012) reported similar findings, including that graduates felt equipped to handle college-level courses. This group of IB graduates was particularly confident when it came to their analytical writing skills and critical thinking skills.

In terms of the social and psychological, IB students fare well in spite of the stress that they experience (Shaunessy, Suldo, Hardesty, & Shaffer, 2006; Shaunessy, Suldo, & Friedrich, 2011). In numerous studies though, students participating in the program brought up the issue of the division between IB and non-IB students. In schools with a strand of IB, students mentioned this as a concern. The rift seems to occur due to the perceived elitism of IB and tracking, the unequal distribution of resources, and the physical separation of the two groups of students within the school as a result of the different curricula (Culross & Tarver, 2007; Foust et al., 2008; Foust et al., 2009; Hertberg-Davis et al., 2006; Merrow, 1981).

Overall, students participating in the IB DP are happy to be in the program and believe that the program will give them a lead in the college admissions process and
prepare them for college success in the future. They also recognize the challenges of being in IB that go from the personal (stress and anxiety) to the social (separation of IB and non-IB students). Based on the research, it appears that IB DP students are willing to cope, make concessions, and delay gratification for the promise of a better future.

**International Baccalaureate Diploma Program as a gifted program.** The first thing to recognize is that IB does not claim to be a gifted program (Nugent & Karnes, 2002; Tookey, 1999/2000). It is enough to visit the IBO website to confirm this. Even after perusing through the website and various IBO publications, one will not find this language purported by IBO. The labeling of IB as a gifted program is external.

For many IB is considered the equivalent of a gifted program even though the research is limited on the effectiveness of IB for gifted and talented high school students (Hertberg-Davis et al., 2006; Nugent & Karnes, 2002; Tookey, 1999/2000). Examples of IB being implemented as an alternative for gifted or academically advanced students abound (Coca et al., 2012; Foust, Hertberg-Davis, & Callahan, 2009; Kyburg et al., 2007; Shaunessy et al., 2006; Vanderbrook, 2006). In reviewing the literature, an interesting discovery is that it is often assumed that IB is synonymous with gifted.

Although research is narrow, arguments in support of IB as a viable option for gifted students do exist (Poelzer & Feldhusen, 1997; Tookey, 1999/2000). Poelzer and Feldhusen (1997) justify the appropriateness of the IB program for gifted learners. By comparing examples of IB student tasks and performance assessments to definitions of gifted as provided by other researchers and even the law, which authorizes “special programs to identify, encourage, and meet the special educational needs of children who give evidence of high performance capability in areas such as intellectual, creative,
artistic, leadership capacity, or specific academic fields…” (section 582 (3)(A), PL. 97-35). Additionally Poelzer and Feldhusen, they add teacher observations to support their claim: “One chemistry teacher stated that students in IB can learn in two weeks what students in the regular curriculum require a month to learn, and can learn same concepts at a university level in three weeks” (para. 27). In this example it is not exactly clear how gifted students benefit from the IB program except to say that there may be more material to cover that will keep a gifted student busy. More than anything this example suggests that the students entering the program were identified as gifted previously.

Tookey (1999/2000) defends the IB as an appropriate program for gifted learners as well because of its unique program requirements and the breadth that it covers. These, she argues, provide a venue for reflection, insight, and personal evaluation. When implemented correctly, IB offers the gifted learner a safe environment for learning, appropriate challenges, and opportunities to construct meaning and to develop motivation. Essentially what Poelzer and Feldhusen (1997) and Tookey (1999/2000) declare is that the design of the IB program and its content which values intellectualism and knowledge makes the program appealing to gifted learners. It is harder to establish how it meets the specific needs of gifted and talented youth when there is a lack of research to support such a claim and also when the definition of “gifted” is still debated (Gándara, 2004, 2005; Hertberg-Davis et al., 2006; Márquez, Bermúdez, & Rakow, 1992).

A recurring theme in the literature is that gifted students for the most part enjoy the IB curriculum and find it intellectually stimulating (Coca et al., 2012; Culross & Tarver, 2007; Foust et al., 2009; Hertberg-Davis et al., 2006; Merrow, 1981; Shaunessy
et al., 2006; Taylor & Porath, 2006), though this is not the case for all gifted learners. For a number of students, IB is not a good fit. Some, including traditionally underrepresented youth, find that IB is a one-size-fits-all model that does not meet their needs. Teachers admit to following the IB DP curriculum with little or no differentiation because of the pressure to cover the material and to prepare students for testing. Another problem is that IB teachers believe that those who are in IB should be able to keep up; otherwise, they do not belong in the program (Hertberg-Davis et al., 2006). Differentiation benefits the gifted learner especially in the case of a diverse classroom (Tomlinson et al., 2003). In Chicago 38% of students who enroll in a pre-IB program (grades 9 and 10) cohort their freshmen year end up dropping out (Coca et al., 2012). This could be sign that the program is not addressing their needs. Although this study will only consider the students who remain in the program, it will provide information about why they stayed. This will be a starting off point for future research looking at the students who leave IB before the DP years.

**International Baccalaureate Diploma Program in diverse urban settings.**

Research indicates that IB DP can be successfully implemented in culturally diverse, high-need urban settings (Coca et al., 2012; Kyburg et al., 2007; Roderick et al., 2009; Saavedra, 2011). For this to happen, Kyburg et al. (2007) argue that particular structures need to be in place. Based on their data analysis, the authors found that students from racially, ethnically, and economically diverse backgrounds, and English language learners are more successful in environments that are flexible and meet individual needs through diverse learning strategies. High expectations, the belief that students can
succeed, scaffolding, and support outside of the classroom have been found to be critical components for the success of minority students in the AP and IB programs.

Mayer (2008) also concludes that students in an urban setting, specifically African American, Latino, and Native American students, including English language learners can succeed in an IB DP with the right kinds of supports. Similar to Kyburg et al. (2007), teachers in this environment believe that students have the ability to meet the demands of the rigorous IB curriculum. Furthermore, the school in this study provides academic and social scaffolds along with opportunities for academic enrichment and students had the support of a strong counseling department. In relation to this, the IB coordinators of this school “realized that their students needed a counselor who could help students with college admissions requirements, financial aid, and monitoring students’ academic progress” (p. 225). This indicates that schools may need to provide an understanding of these structures of schooling and education.

The most astonishing piece of Mayer’s (2008) study is that student achievement in IB occurred in a program with an open enrollment policy. The only requirement for admission was motivation. Additionally, 42% of these students began their education as English Language Learners (ELLs). This demonstrates that given the proper tools, students with culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds can tackle a challenging and rigorous curriculum like IB even when they are not identified as gifted. This also demonstrates that the assumption that ELLs cannot be gifted or talented is false. Based on this, it is likely that gifted students of diverse backgrounds would also benefit from similar supports. Through this study, it is possible that Latino/a students will share what supports have helped them succeed in the IB DP.
International Baccalaureate Diploma Program in Chicago. Before beginning the actual IB DP junior year, IB students in Chicago prepare through the pre-IB program during their freshmen and sophomore years. Students apply to the programs before their freshmen year. In order to gain acceptance into an IB program, a student’s grades in reading, math, science, and social studies, 7th grade standardized test scores, and the geographical location of their home are considered to achieve an overall score. Acceptance into an IB program is based on this score (Chicago Public Schools [CPS] Office of Access and Enrollment [OAE], 2014). In this sense, the program is selective and may attract students with gifted needs.

In the case of Chicago, evidence of the success of IB at the secondary level is made available by Saavedra (2011) who found that IB enrollment increases ACT scores, the probability of high school graduation, and the probability of college enrollment. Roderick and colleagues (2009) also discovered academic accomplishments for IB students. Unfortunately, these researchers also uncovered a disconcerting truth. Of the students who aspire to attain a four-year college degree, IB students are less likely than AP students and selective enrollment high school students to enroll in a higher education program even though they tended to have higher grade point averages. This is attributed to a lack of social capital. Social capital as described by James S. Coleman (1988) is a “resource for action” that can be viewed through the lenses of obligations and expectations, information channels, and social norms (p. S95). A person with a strong knowledge base of these three forms possesses the resources necessary to act.

Interestingly, students in IB are representative of the larger CPS population of students in terms of demographics and socioeconomic status, although there is a high
proportion of Latinos in IB. The reason for this is that IB programs are housed in neighborhood schools. For the most part these students are first-generation college students and minority. In addition, many come from high poverty neighborhoods and have limited contact with adults with a college education who could help them navigate the college search and application process (Roderick et al., 2009). These statistics support the importance of better understanding the experience of Latino/a students in IB.

A recent study by Coca and colleagues (2012) focused solely on IB students and reported similar results as the previous report. Some key findings were that IB DP students are 40% more likely to attend four-year colleges, 50% are more likely to attend more selective colleges, and students felt more prepared for the demands of college as a result of the skills acquired in the IB program. Again, by the end of high school IB students had higher grade point averages than students in selective enrollment programs. Moreover, 41% of IB students qualified for a very selective college, while for students in a selective enrollment school it was 31%. These accomplishments were possible even though IB students were less likely to be in the top achievement quartile when they started high school. As a matter of fact, for some students IB was a second choice when not admitted to a selective enrollment program. IB programs in Chicago accept a greater number of academically weaker and disadvantaged students. The unfortunate news in this study was that lack of social capital continued to be an issue. For example, students need assistance with college planning. Latinos comprised the highest proportion of IB students at 38%. Once again, this stresses the benefit this study can have for IB DP programs in Chicago, because it will provide information from the perspective of Latino/a students.
In the same month that the Coca and colleagues (2012) study came out, the mayor of Chicago, Rahm Emanuel and then CEO of CPS, Jean-Claude Brizard announced that 10 more IB DP programs would be opening in the fall of 2013 (CPS, 2012a). The results of these reports overshadowed the concerns. The declaration of this plan led to higher than normal media coverage of IB that included some apprehension. The Chicago Teacher’s Union (CTU) expressed one concern, which fears that the expansion of IB is a ploy of the mayor’s to lure middle-class white families into the city. This, the union claims, will result in the further marginalization of minorities (Huffington Post, 2012). On the other hand, there is concern that Chicagoans with middle- and upper-incomes do not and will not enroll their children in IB programs due to safety concerns. An educational consultant interviewed by WBEZ radio explained, “‘People say, ‘Oh, we live in a diverse city. We want diversity in our kids’ classrooms.’ But at the same time, white people won’t put their kids in a school that’s 99 percent black” (Lutton, 2012). This demonstrates that in spite of the work and advances made against racial and ethnic discrimination, we cannot ignore or pretend that this does not play a role in our current society and that it infiltrates our educational system making a study of this scope necessary.

**Latinos and Education**

**Challenges faced by Latinos in education.** According to the most recent census, there are 50.0 million people – 16% of the population – of Hispanic or Latino origin in the U.S. (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Latinos are the fastest growing minority and the group with the lowest levels of educational attainment (American Federation of Teachers [AFT], 2004; Gándara, 2010; U.S. Department of Education, 2011). In Illinois today,
Latinos represent 25% of children under the age of five. It is expected that the high school senior class of 2020 will be made up of mostly Latinos a “minority-majority” group of graduates. Achievement gaps in Illinois between White and Latino students can be seen in the areas of 3rd grade reading, 8th grade reading, 11th grade reading, 3rd grade ISAT reading and math, 8th grade ISAT reading and math, and ACT reading and math. When it comes to college, Latinos are the least likely of any other race or ethnicity in the state to enroll in a 4-year college (Vonderlack-Navarro, 2011). With statistics this dire, it is impossible not to ask why this is happening.

La Roche and Shriberg (2004) answered: “The goals and structure of public schools in the U.S. have often reflected values that historically have not been conducive to success for Latino students” (p. 219). A problem that 46% of Latino students in Illinois face is that they are more likely to live and attend schools in high-poverty urban areas that lack the resources needed to help them achieve academically (Latino Policy Forum, 2012b). Tracking and high-stakes testing reforms have negatively impacted Latino students in the past as well (La Roche & Shriberg, 2004; Latino Policy Forum, 2012a; Oakes, 2005). Additional challenges include lack of access to highly-qualified teachers, lack of access to college preparatory courses, underrepresentation in gifted programs, low expectations from teachers, high levels of segregation from the mainstream, parents with low household incomes and low levels of education, lack of social capital, unmet instructional needs for ELLs and ELLs with disabilities, high mobility, racial and ethnic stereotyping, and undocumented immigration status (AFT, 2004; Education Trust, 2003; Gándara 2004, 2005, 2010; U.S. Department of Education, 2011).
Reading this list is exhausting, but it serves to underscore that Latino students are not inherently immune to learning. The struggles students of this population face are at times enormous and seemingly insurmountable. In spite of these odds, there are Latino students who achieve academically (Coca et al., 2012; Roderick et al., 2009). It is absolutely wrong to say that these students are somehow better than those who do not. Instead, we should observe which situations, strategies, and coping mechanisms lead them to excel despite the obstacles so that we can be proactive about providing them for other students in similar situations.

**Gifted, talented, and high-achieving Latino students.** A common concern that arises in conversations regarding gifted Latino students is the underrepresentation of these students in gifted programs. The state of Illinois is an example of this disproportion. In 2000, 15% of Latinos were enrolled public K-12 schools, but only 6% were classified as gifted and talented. On the contrary, 80% of White students were labeled gifted and talented while making up 60% of the K-12 enrollment (Education Trust, 2003). The identification of Latino students in gifted programs is something that educators need to concern themselves with because these programs can open the educational doors for students by giving them access to trained teachers, a rigorous curriculum, and college-preparatory courses. Another reason provided by Gándara (2005) is that a sensible strategy for closing the Latino achievement gap is to focus on Latino high-achievers. These students although with high ability, still perform at lower levels than White high-achievers. For years research has focused on “bring[ing] up the bottom;” but, she argues, high-achieving Latino students are more likely to close the gap (p. 4).
The underrepresentation of Latinos in gifted education is attributed to factors such as low academic expectations for Latinos and the inability to identify giftedness in linguistically and culturally diverse children (Gándara, 2004, 2005; Márquez, Bermúdez, & Rakow, 1992). Of course, not all Latino students are ELLs, but for those that are identifying them as gifted is difficult if they are not being tested in Spanish (Gándara, 2005). It must also be recognized that the definition of gifted is not one that is accepted by all (Gándara, 2004, 2005; Hertberg-Davis et al., 2006; Márquez et al., 1992). Márquez et al. performed an insightful study in which members of the Latino community were asked to define giftedness. The results were based on the responses of 85 participants. The participants did not perceive that the characteristics that are in the federal definition of gifted were necessarily good indicators of giftedness in the Latino child. Instead they valued creative thinking, productive thinking, leadership, communication abilities, and minimizing achievement.

Once Latinos are identified as gifted, it appears that the school environment is more supportive of them than of the Latinos in general education classes. Adolescent gifted Latinos felt that their teachers believed in them, felt intelligent, spoke less Spanish, were more likely to communicate in ways similar to the mainstream culture, and identified more with their “giftedness.” This was in opposition to Latino students in general education who embraced their ethnic identity more (McHatton et al., 2007). For McHatton et al., a question arose from these findings,

Were these students identified for gifted because they followed the rules – even if they were unspoken – in downplaying their ethnicity, or are they downplaying their ethnicity as result of their affiliation with other students of similar abilities with whom they readily connect? (p. 18)
This question speaks to the definition of gifted and it suggests that Latinos may be downplaying their ethnicity as a coping mechanism or to feel a sense of belonging. Whatever the truth may be, school environments should not be putting students in a position where they have to sacrifice a part of their identity to survive or to succeed. This is just one of the possible barriers with which Latino gifted students must deal.

Differences between high-achieving Latinos and Whites exist in regard to parental education and income. The parents of gifted Latinos are less likely to have graduated from high school (ATF, 2004; Gándara, 2005; Roderick et al., 2009). This matters because the educational level of parents, especially the mother’s, is considered a predictor of academic success. Also, the stresses that come with growing up in a low-income household have an effect on academic achievement (Gándara, 2005; Willingham, 2012).

To make up for the challenges faced by high-achieving Latino students, schools need to closely monitor personal and academic growth, allow access to a high-quality, rigorous curriculum, scaffold instruction, and encourage the formation of academic peer groups (Gándara, 2004). The success of scaffolding instruction and modifications to curriculum has been seen with gifted and talented minorities (Kyburg et al., 2007) and students who were not identified as such (Mayer, 2008). Since the importance of mentors and role models for disadvantaged youth is well documented (Stanton-Salazar & Spina, 2003), school staff should foster these relationships. These close ties with educated adults can make up for students’ lack of social capital. Counseling departments also need to play a role in helping students maneuver school and the college planning and application processes. Teachers who work with this population of students need cultural competence
to understand the linguistic and cultural backgrounds of Latino gifted students (Latino Policy Forum, 2012c) and the role that they play in cognition (Sheets, 2009).

The aim of this research will be to examine the experiences of high-achieving Latino/a students, including challenges and successes. Previous literature has contributed to this topic, yet Latino/a students have not been looked at within a single context. This study will contribute to the literature by focusing only on Latino/a students in an IB DP program. By doing this, this dissertation will seek to uncover culturally relevant and responsive teaching practices identified by students that lead to socially just practices that are mindful of Critical Theory.

**Theoretical Framework**

When speaking of social justice in education, it is imperative to recognize that this thinking is born out of Critical Theory (Gutek, 2009). The many issues faced by Latinos in education are indicators of the necessity for using Critical Theory and one of its branches Latino Critical Theory also known as LatCrit Theory (Delgado Bernal, 2002). The dire statistics demand awareness and a change if we believe that all human beings hold the same value and we desire to live in a productive community. The philosophy that I hold in high regard is the social justice approach. I view my work through this lens and it is the cognitive frame of reference under which I operate. My working definition of social justice holds as a premise that all human beings are equal. I recognize that in spite of landmark changes in the law, our society does not offer the same opportunities to all and some groups are still at a disadvantage because historically, due to racism, sexism, classism, homophobia, and other forms of discrimination certain people have not been allowed to hold positions of power. Some people are born with a head start and the social
justice approach recognizes this. As an educator, I believe that part of my job is to teach students to speak for themselves and to provide opportunities for those who have been traditionally disempowered by our society.

**Critical Theory**

Gerald L. Gutek (2009) defines Critical Theory as complex “assumptions about society, education, and schooling that analyzes aims, institutions, organization, curriculum, and instruction in terms of power relationships” (p. 393). In education, power relationships are dissected by questioning and discussing who has control in society and schools and their reasons, who decides who gets resources and who are the beneficiaries, who creates school policy and who does it help, who establishes the goals and curriculum of schools, how is academic success evaluated, and what power do teachers and students have (Gutek, 2009). According to Gutek, a curriculum with a social justice approach will include consciousness-raising of the oppressed; analyze the “official curriculum” and the “hidden curriculum”; deconstruct language; scrutinize the power and objectivity of science; encourage students to articulate their beliefs and values; allow teachers to conduct research that considers the social, economic and political context of the student; support teachers in their role as “transformative agents” for change; and, contest counterproductive ideologies.

When examining Critical Theory, a prominent name emerges: Paulo Freire. In his influential text, *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (1970), Paulo Freire discusses power relationships in society in terms of the oppressed and the oppressors. Freire writes that the goal of the oppressors is not to change societal structures; instead, it is to change the oppressed. He illustrates this by including a quote by the French philosopher, Simone de
Beauvoir. Freire writes, “Indeed, the interests of the oppressors lie in ‘changing the consciousness of the oppressed, not the situation which oppresses them’” (as cited in Freire, 1970, p. 74). When as a society we are not bothered by the underachievement or the challenges faced by Latinos in education, we are reinforcing the power of the dominant culture. We constantly blame the victim by charging them to pull themselves up by their own bootstraps. In the case of Latino high school students, they are the ones who need to change, not the system – a rhetoric that only serves to perpetuate the myth of meritocracy.

For Freire, though, change is possible through his recommended praxis that involves thought and action. Freire proposes that through education the oppressed gain conscientização, or a critical consciousness, which then leads to transformative change. In addition to understanding the world around her, a person will stand up and take action against oppressive forces. In this circumstance the role of the educator is crucial. To empower the marginalized, the educator must first accept that the oppressed are already a part of society. Additionally, the role of the teacher as a depositor of knowledge must change because the relationship between teacher and student is also one of unequal power. In critical theory, the teacher needs to reject the banking concept, meaning that the teacher possesses the knowledge and transfers it to the students who are devoid of it. Instead, teachers should function more as facilitators. Other concepts to be embraced by educators are that change is a process, learning takes place through the problem-posing of authentic experiences, the process of learning itself occurs through dialogue, and finally, recognize that we are historical beings (Freire, 1970).
In addition to Freire, Henry A. Giroux, another notable critical theorist, also calls for pedagogy in education that “raise[s] students’ consciousness, encourage[es] them to reflect critically on social reality, and empower[s] them to transform the conditions, the contexts, that shape their lives” (Gutek, 2009, p. 401). Like Freire, Henry Giroux is against the banking concept of education and also believes that societal and political change can occur through education. Giroux identifies *self-conscious critique* as a central concept of Critical Theory. Giroux (1983) argues for a dialectical way of thinking that links history, culture, and psychology to understand and question critically current social structures, not just for the sake of questioning, but to lead and inform change.

**Critical Race Theory and Latino Critical Theory**

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is a framework that originated from a legal movement, Critical Legal Studies (CLS). The need for CRT arose because CLS was not doing enough to push the boundaries that would result in change. Most importantly CLS minimized the role of race. CRT theorists contend that race continues to play a role in contemporary society. In addition, CRT theorists criticize liberalism because it does not demand a dramatic change. In the field of education CRT theorists embrace these ideas in order to eliminate racism and subordination (Ladson-Billings, 1999) by steering educators away from genetic and cultural deficit models in the classroom (Solórzano, 1997).

Latino Critical Theory or LatCrit is one of several branches of CRT. As such, LatCrit follows and maintains the five central themes of CRT: (1) the intercentricity of race and racism, or the prevalence and permanence of both, (2) the challenge to dominant ideology in education, such as objectivity, meritocracy, color-blindness, race neutrality,
and equal opportunity, (3) the commitment to social justice, (4) the interdisciplinary perspective that occurs by drawing from a variety of disciplines and theories, and (5) the centrality of experiential knowledge, which focuses on giving voice to students of color.

Along with this last element, LatCrit embraces the element of counterstorytelling, which is such an essential component of CRT (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Yosso, Villalpando, Bernal, & Solórzano, 2001). Counterstorytelling is extremely crucial to CRT and LatCrit because it recognizes the first-hand experiences and knowledge of those with little influence in society. It is a powerful method and it can do several things such as humanize the marginalized and empower them as they realize a new reality, contradict what we think we know and challenge our belief systems to construct a new reality (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). Delgado Bernal (2002) states that, “To recognize all students as holders and creators of knowledge, it is imperative that the histories, experiences, cultures, and languages of students of color are recognized and valued in school” (p. 121). The method of counterstorytelling does this (Fernández, 2002).
Note. Visual demonstrating the central themes of LatCrit Theory including the element of counterstorytelling.

Figure 1. LatCrit Theory

LatCrit differs from CRT in that it moves the discussion beyond race. In LatCrit, ethnicity is recognized as a vital component because together with race it defines the identities of Latinos. The race and ethnicity of Latinos are then considered in the context of (a) equality in law and life, (b) immigration, borders, and nations, and (c) language, culture, and expression (Valdés, 1997). In the realm of education, these same concepts are applied specifically to Latino students. Delgado Bernal (2002) challenges the use of a Eurocentric lens to define Latino students and redefines knowledge in terms of language, culture, and community involvement. She adds that like CRT, LatCrit acknowledges that power and politics are a part of education, therefore one of the elements is to question dominant ideologies by asking what counts as knowledge. LatCrit states that teaching and
learning must consider culture as well as home experiences. A commitment to social justice is another crucial element of LatCrit. When using this framework in education and research, the expectation is that it will drive change in the realms of the political and social. For this to occur, the perspective of various disciplines is encouraged when applying the LatCrit framework. As an element, the interdisciplinary perspective provides an approach for researchers that fortify the work by drawing on the strengths of various methods and disciplines to improve the education of students of color.

An additional element of LatCrit is the emphasis placed on experiential knowledge. The life experiences of students of color are seen as key; furthermore, they are considered a strength (Delgado Bernal, 2002). This is where counterstories come in as an element of LatCrit. According to Solórzano and Delgado Bernal (2001), counterstories serve two main purposes. Counterstorytelling is an opportunity for students of color to speak of their experiences from their own point of view. Additionally, counterstorytelling can be a tool for the analysis of the stories that have already been told about students of color by those in power. This “methodology” questions the dominant discourse by giving voice to those who have been marginalized (p. 327).

CRT and LatCrit ask educators to be student-centered and to value the experiences of every single student by giving each individual a platform to voice their experiences. These frameworks require us to challenge social structures that discriminate some, while authorizing others to achieve and be successful. CRT and LatCrit force educators to make sound decisions based on inquiry because we wish to see all of our students succeed because we believe that as human beings they deserve to be treated fairly and with dignity.
The current research on the IB DP considers the experiences of diverse groups of students. This dissertation will focus on one population only, which will be Latinos in an IB DP. Using LatCrit theory as a framework, students will have the opportunity to tell their counterstory. Latino students in an IB DP will recount their experiences and express their needs.
CHAPTER III
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study followed a qualitative model to explore how the International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma Program (DP) in Chicago meets the needs of its Latino students. Additionally, this research looked at how the program can improve to better serve this population of students.

Research Design

The research design that I utilized in this study is the case study design grounded in a phenomenological approach. Phenomenology in qualitative research comes from the field of philosophy and the beliefs of Edmund Husserl, a twentieth century German philosopher (Groenewald, 2004). In phenomenology it is important “to focus on the experience itself and how experiencing something is transformed into consciousness” (Merriam, 2009, p. 24). Martin Heidegger, a student of Husserl, stressed the importance of the “dialogue between a person and her world” (Groenewald, 2004, p. 4). The role of the researcher in phenomenology is to describe as purely as possible a phenomenon from the point of view of those who experience it to arrive at the essence of the phenomenon (Groenewald, 2004; Merriam, 2009). I chose the phenomenological approach because this thinking is aligned with the theoretical framework of this study – LatCrit Theory. One of the tenets of LatCrit Theory is to acknowledge the experiences of Latino students and to give them a voice. The goal of phenomenology is to explain an experience from the perspective of the person living it in the purest form possible. The data gathering, data
collection procedures, and data explicitation procedures of this dissertation embrace the phenomenological research approach.

**Participants**

The participants in this study were high school students. Participants were selected using purposive sampling. In phenomenological research all participants need to have experience with the phenomenon being studied, therefore, students needed to meet three requirements: they were IB DP students; they identified as Latino; and they were in their junior or senior year of study at Rydell High School. The first two criteria were vital to the research proposed by this dissertation. The third criterion was added to guarantee that students had sufficient experience with the IB program. Students needed to be in their junior year of high school at the very least to ensure that they had at least one year of experience in the IB DP.

I recruited participants in person by speaking to them in their IB Spanish language class, explaining the study and what participants would be asked to do, and inviting students who wished to participate to take consent forms for their parents to sign and assent forms for they themselves to sign. During this initial meeting, those who wished to participate told me in person after the first meeting. Once students expressed interest, I emailed them a recruitment letter with next steps, including how we would schedule interviews.

The goal was to have between 8-10 participants. The aim when conducting a qualitative study is to achieve sufficiency and saturation (Seidman, 2006). In a phenomenological study, ten participants are considered an appropriate sample size to accomplish this (Rudestam & Newton, 2007). In the end, the participant group was
composed of seven high school students who identified as Latino/a and who were enrolled in the International Baccalaureate Diploma Program during their 11th or 12th year of high school. All participants provided assent and submitted parent consent forms for participation in this study. The participant group consisted of four females and three males. Six of the seven participants were juniors. The one senior participant was a female student. All students with the exception of one male junior completed the interview series. This male junior completed two out of three interviews.

**Setting**

This study took place at a school with an International Baccalaureate Diploma Program – Rydell High School. Rydell High School is a large Chicago Public School (CPS) with an enrollment of 3,167 students. This high school is located in the northwest side of the city. The racial and ethnic makeup of the school is the following: White 48.4%; Hispanic 39.1%; Asian 7.8%; Black 2.2%; Other 2.6%. The percentage of low-income students is 62.6% and the percentage of English Learners students is 6.4%; lower than the 2014 district average, which is 17%. Diverse learners make up 12.2% of the population at Rydell. Besides the IB DP, Rydell High School also houses a Middle Years Program (MYP) for 9th and 10th graders as a result of being a wall-to-wall IB school (CPS, 2015).

According to the CPS School Quality Rating Policy, the school’s performance rating is Level 2+ which is the mid-band. The accountability status of Rydell High School is *Good Standing* (CPS, 2015). Level 2+ means that the school’s performance is average and that support is needed from the assigned network to put in place interventions. The fact that Rydell falls in the 1+ - 2+ ranges tells us that that the school
is meeting or exceeding the minimum performance expectation for schools in the district (CPS, 2014).

I chose Rydell High School because it has an IB DP and it is located in an urban setting. Also, the school houses a large Latino/a student population. Finally, because of its academic standing, Rydell High School might be considered a target for the introduction of reform efforts, such as IB. It will be interesting to see if the IB DP is making a difference for the Latino students at Rydell High School who are currently enrolled in the program.

**Data Gathering and Instrumentation**

To understand the experience of Latino students in the IB DP, I conducted in-depth phenomenological interviews as described by Irving Seidman (2006). All participants were interviewed using this same format. Each participant was interviewed three separate times. Interviews were structured as follows -

- Interview One: Focused Life History
- Interview Two: The Details of Experience
- Interview Three: Reflection on the Meaning

The goal was to have participants describe their experience so that they could make sense of it. The type of interview structure that I employed to realize this was the semi-structured interview. Interviews included a mix of all types of questions, questions were flexible, and the order of the questions was not scripted (Merriam, 2009). Interviews began with semi-structured questions that eventually led to open-ended questions. Two critical open-ended questions proposed by Moustakas (1994) were tailored to form a part
of the interview protocol for this study as proposed by Creswell (2006). The guiding questions were:

- What have you experienced in terms of the phenomenon?
- What contexts or situations have typically influenced or affected your experiences of the phenomenon?

The time frame between each interview was approximately one week. This window allowed participants time to process the interview without sacrificing memory of the experience. When it comes to the length of time for each interview, I deviated from Seidman’s model. Although Seidman (2006) recommends a 90-minute format, the length of time for each interview in this study was between 45 to 60 minutes. The model was adjusted for the adolescent participants who may find it difficult to sit through a 90-minute interview. Also, it was much more practical to schedule interviews for hourly increments when planning to meet during a school period. Whenever possible, interviews were scheduled before or after school.

**Data Collection Procedures**

With interviews one must keep in mind that it is a dialogue. As a researcher I aimed to provide a safe space and time for participants to share their lived experience. At the same time, though, we were both interacting in the experience so that we could understand it together. Groenewald (2004) explains this by quoting the qualitative researcher, Steinar Kvale. Groenewald says, “Kvale (2006) remarks with regard to data capturing during the qualitative interview that it ‘is literally an inter view, an interchange of views between two persons conversing about a theme of mutual interest,’ where researcher attempts to ‘understand the world from the subjects’ point of view, to unfold
meaning of peoples’ experiences” (as cited in Groenewald, 2004, p. 13). To remain true to the essence of this statement it was critical to be thoughtful about the way in which data was collected. Interview data was collected in two ways.

First, all interviews were recorded using a digital audio recorder. Not only did I want to make sure that I had access to everything that was said, I also wanted to be able to refer back to it at any given moment. Interviews occurred during June of 2014. Interviews were scheduled with the participants after they submitted their consent forms to me. They took place in a private space at Rydell High School or a public setting familiar to the participants. As stated previously, interviews were spaced one week apart.

The second thing that I did to collect data during the interviews was to take notes. This is an important data collection tool because it will allow me to highlight something as simple as a gesture or a phrase. Furthermore, the note taking captured my perceptions of the interview as I described it in the moment. As a result of this, I made connections that led to probing or clarifying questions.

Of the two data collection procedures, the interviews were my main source of data. This is aligned with LatCrit theory and the idea that the students that I interviewed were given the platform to tell their own counterstory. The notes that I took during the interviews served as supplementary sources of information. These helped me prepare for subsequent interviews and to clarify any misunderstandings. Documents and information pertaining to each individual participant were kept together in a password-protected file on my computer.
Data Explicitation Procedures

Since phenomenology is about describing an experience and not necessarily an analysis (Moustakas, 1994), I have chosen to use the word *explicitation* for this section instead of analysis in the manner of Groenewald (2004). Throughout every section of this paper, I want to make sure that it is the voice of the students that is being heard.

Procedure

Before beginning the explicitation process, all interview data were transcribed. A professional and reputable company transcribed all audio recordings. This is a company that specializes in academic transcription and ensures confidentiality. The company has a “Non-Disclosure Agreement” available for their clients that prohibit the company from releasing any content into the public domain. Once interviews were transcribed, I checked the transcripts for errors as recommended by Merriam (2009). Transcripts of the interviews were used for the data explicitation process.

The data explicitation process followed the procedures outlined by Moustakas (1994) and summarized by Creswell (2006). The technique employed in this study did not stray from other qualitative data analysis procedures and it is the one recommended for phenomenological qualitative research by several researchers (Creswell, 2006; Merriam, 2009; Seidman, 2006). The steps that took to organize the data and explain the phenomenon under study follow here:

1. Horizontalization – During this first stage, I treated all data equally. I looked for statements and quotes that explain the experience of the participants.

2. Clusters of meaning – Here, I categorized the statements that stood out during the horizontalization stage and developed themes.
3. Textural description – This is where I described in writing the experience of the participants.

4. Structural description – Using the textural description, I explained how the context affected the experience of the phenomena for the participants.

5. Composite description – This final step combines the textural and structural descriptions. This part focuses on the essence of the experience of all of the participants.

The steps described above informed the coding of the interviews, which led to the interpretation of the data. Data organization and coding was completed via a web-based application.

Validity

Issues of validity can be quite controversial in qualitative studies (Kvale, 1995; Maxwell, 1992; Merriam, 2009; Seidman, 2006). Seidman states, “There is room in the universe for multiple approaches to validity” (p. 26). In qualitative research validity threats are resolved in a manner that is different from quantitative studies and they should be adapted for the work that sits in front of you (Maxwell, 1992).

Seidman (2006) provides an example of how validity is achieved in the in-depth phenomenological interview in the following passage:

The structure of the three interviews, the passage of time over which the interviews occur, the internal consistency and possible external consistency of the passages, the syntax, the diction, and even nonverbal aspects of the passage, and the discovery and sense of learning that I get from reading the passage lead me to have confidence in the authenticity. Because we are concerned with the participant’s understanding of her experience, the authenticity of what she is saying makes it reasonable for me to have confidence in its validity for her. (p. 26)
Authenticity was a key factor in this study. For authenticity to occur, I modeled it by being open with the participants. Again, the importance of a safe space was stressed. This included the guarantee of confidentiality and also an interview that was dialogical as opposed to a rigid interrogation. Allowing students to be themselves and to speak in their preferred language and register was critical. My knowledge of three languages and my understanding of code switching was an asset that I made use of during the data collection phase.

For my part in this study, trustworthiness as defined by Guba (1981) played an important role. I strived for honesty by sharing my own experiences as a Latina along with my background and qualifications. Honesty was also present as I acknowledged my own biases through note-taking and personal reflection. These actions contributed to high credibility and objectivity.

Besides the structure of the in-depth interview, validity was ensured in this study though member checks. These occurred throughout the interview series in several ways with the help of the participants themselves. For instance, I made sure to ask follow-up and clarifying questions. I also asked participants to elaborate or provide examples. In addition, I restated responses and asked for confirmation from the participants to make sure that I had understood correctly. The notes I took during each interview also contributed to validity in this study. Validity was also met with the digital recording of the interviews.

**Methodological Considerations**

In a qualitative study, generalizability is often cited as a limitation because the small sample size does not necessarily allow one to make predictions about other similar
populations (Merriam, 2009). On the other hand, naturalistic generalizations as described by Stake and Trumbull (1982) are certainly a possibility. As readers engage with this study they might create connections with their own work.

This study took place in a specific setting with a specific group of participants. The sample size of seven is sufficient for the purposes of this research, but it is small. I balanced this by providing a thick description (Merriam, 2009; Rudestam & Newton, 2007). The setting and participants are described in as much detail as possible without compromising confidentiality. With this methodology it is important to keep in mind that quality and depth are the goal not quality and breadth.

**Ethical Considerations**

Since I interviewed high school students, most were under 18 years of age, which made the participants of this study a vulnerable population. Due to this I will implement safeguards to ensure their safety and respect their confidentiality. To begin, their parents were the ones to grant permission by signing the informed consent form. It was also important for me to obtain the assent from the participants themselves. Participants were reminded at the start of each interview that their participation was completely voluntary. To protect the confidentiality of the participants, I use only pseudonyms when discussing the research in writing or verbally. All documents and materials used during the data collection and data explicitation procedure are stored on my personal computer in a password-protected file when not in use.

**Reflection on Qualitative Research and Validity**

When it comes to research, my own feeling is that those of us who do qualitative research suffer from a sort of inferiority complex when compared to our cousin the
quantitative researcher. Even though we see the value and the importance of our work, we seek validation from our peers. Although I understand the importance of validity, I do believe that designing a study around the concept of validity takes away from the work itself. In the spirit of the phenomenological study, I wanted to make sure to focus on the experiences of the students in an IB DP. I could have interviewed other stakeholders in the program, such as teachers, or I could have added other external sources of data, but I felt strongly that this would interfere with the philosophy and theoretical framework of the study, which challenges the power structures in society and stresses that the story should come from the participants themselves. This is not to say that this study is not valid. It is simply to explain that validity appears differently.
CHAPTER IV
DATA EXPLICITATION AND FINDINGS

This chapter will provide a description of the format of the study and the participants, followed by the research questions and the explicitation of data collected. The explicitation of data is organized in terms of the two specific research questions posed in the first chapter and their respective sub-questions.

Overview of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the experience of Latino/a students in an International Baccalaureate (IB) program in Chicago. Considering Latinos/as separately affords us the opportunity to consider strengths and challenges unique to this growing population of students. Through the use of in-depth interviews, participants had the chance to describe and make meaning out of their experiences in IB. Additionally, participants were able to express their beliefs about IB and identify elements about the program at their school that are effective, ineffective, or need improvement. Specifically, participants were asked to discuss their academic, social and linguistic needs in relation to college and career readiness and their long-term plans and goals.

Students are profiled through direct quotations to emphasize the major themes. One of the tenets of Latino Critical Theory, the framework applied to this study, is the importance of embracing the first-hand accounts of those who are marginalized in society. Asking for and listening to a narrative as told by the individual who experienced it, instead of a third-person account is empowering because it allows someone to tell and
create their own story as opposed to an interpretation which is viewed through another’s context, world-view and beliefs. The presentation of this counterstory, the story of Latino/a youth, is the ultimate goal of this dissertation.

This study was conducted during June of 2014 at a large, Chicago Public School high school on the northwest side of the city – Rydell High School. Rydell High School houses an IB Diploma Program (DP) for juniors and seniors. To prepare for IB, students are enrolled in pre-IB courses during their freshmen and sophomore year. The IB DP has existed at Rydell High School since 2001. For over a decade, IB DP functioned as a program within the school. In 2013, the school implemented a wall-to-wall IB program.

Acceptance into the Rydell High School IB DP is based on an overall score for each applicant. Students are ranked by their score, which is comprised of “performance on the NWEA MAP\(^1\) (450 points) and seventh grade report card grades in reading, math, science, and social studies (450 points). Students residing within the boundary of a high school with an IB program will receive 50 additional points. These points will be awarded before the selection process” (Chicago Public Schools [CPS] Office of Access and Enrollment [OAE], 2014).

In order to receive Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the Research Review Board (RRB) approval, it was necessary to obtain a letter of cooperation from the building principal. The principal and assistant principal both wrote letters of cooperation for this study upon being informed of the details via email. The school’s IB Coordinator

\(^1\)The NWEA MAP is an acronym for Northwest Evaluation Association Measures of Academic Progress. The NWEA describes the MAP as an adaptive assessment that measures student progress or growth in the areas of mathematics, reading, language usage, and science (NWEA, 2011).
was also informed of the details of the study. Recruitment took place during the week of May 12, 2014. I recruited participants in person by speaking to them in their International Baccalaureate Spanish language class, explaining the study and what participants would be asked to do, and inviting students who wished to participate to take consent forms for their parents to sign and assent forms for them to sign. During this initial meeting, students received my number and email. Those who wished to participate informed me right away in person. I returned to the high school to collect assent and consent forms after my initial visit. To students that expressed interest and returned all forms signed, I emailed a reminder of participation letter that included next steps.

All participants were interviewed using the same format. Each participant with the exception of one was interviewed three separate times. Interviews were structured as follows (Seidman, 2006):

- Interview One: Focused Life History
- Interview Two: The Details of Experience
- Interview Three: Reflection on the Meaning

The goal was for participants to describe their experiences in the IB program in order to make sense of them. The interview style was semi-structured, and I was the only person collecting data. The timeframe between each interview was approximately one week. The length of time for each interview in this study was approximately 45 minutes. Interviews were scheduled for before or after school or during student lunch periods. The majority of the interviews took place at the school in an empty classroom. Three interviews were conducted in a public location chosen by the individual participant. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim.
Description of Participants

The participant group was composed of high school students who identified as Latino/a and who were enrolled in the International Baccalaureate Diploma Program during their 11th or 12th grade year of high school. Seven students agreed to participate in the study – four females and three males. Six participants completed the three-interview series. One male participated in the first two interviews only. Of the seven participants one was a high school senior; the rest were juniors at the high school. Table 1 lists the students who participated in the study.

Table 1

List of Student Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Year in School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student 1</td>
<td>Katherine</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student 2</td>
<td>Isabel</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student 3</td>
<td>Rosa</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student 4</td>
<td>Rico</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student 5</td>
<td>Benicio</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student 6</td>
<td>Allison</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student 7</td>
<td>Diego</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Research Questions

1. How do Latino/a students in an urban setting make meaning out of their experiences in an IB DP program?
a. What are Latino/a students’ long-term goals and plans and how does IB fit into their visions?

b. How do Latino/a students perceive themselves academically, linguistically, and socially and how does IB contribute to their perceptions of self?

2. What beliefs do Latino/a students hold about how the IB DP at their school acknowledges their academic, linguistic, and social needs to ensure that they are college and career ready?

   a. What elements of the IB program do Latino/a students identify as promoting their academic, linguistic, and social success?

   b. What elements of the IB program do Latino/a students identify as ineffective in promoting their academic, linguistic, and social success?

   c. How do Latino/a students think the IB program could better promote their academic, linguistic, and social success?

**Explicitation of Data Collected**

Phenomenological interview techniques were used to provide an emic account of the International Baccalaureate program from the point of view of high school Latino students who participate in it. The data consisted primarily of audio-recorded interviews, although notes were taken during the interviews. The interviews consisted of three separate conversations each lasting approximately 45 minutes. The interpretations of data composed of shared qualities and relationships are presented below.
Research Question 1

How do Latino/a students in an urban setting make meaning out of their experiences in an IB DP program?

Students shared their long-term goals and plans and shared how they believed IB would help them accomplish these. Participants also reflected on their self-perceptions and the ways in which IB contributes or has contributed to their academic, linguistic, and social selves.

Sub-question 1a: What are Latino/a students’ long-term goals and plans and how does IB fit into their visions? All seven participants stated they were interested in pursuing a higher education. They view the IB DP as a means to that end. Participants believe that through participation in the IB DP, they will receive preparation that will lead to college readiness and college acceptance. Furthermore, they trust they will be successful in college due to the preparation received through the IB program.

“I’m definitely going to college for sure. There’s no question about that.”

Katherine answered very confidently when asked about whether or not she planned to attend college after graduating from high school. As a matter of fact, all of the participants responded to this question in an assertive and similar fashion. None of the participants doubted that higher education was in their future. Their responses were interesting because many of the students will be the first or among the first in their families to attend college in the United States. This is certainly the case for Katherine, Isabel, Rosa, and Diego. Also noteworthy was the fact that students not only made this statement for themselves, but also for their fellow IB DP classmates. It was a given to the students participating in this study that if you were in the IB DP, then you were going to
college. In one of her interviews Isabel stated, “I think all of us in IB, you have that expectation like I’m going through this not just to like stop learning after high school.” All participants made similar statements with the underlying assumption that IB DP classmates were attending college after high school.

In addition to stating that college was in their future, five out of the seven students were also able to identify a career choice. All of these require a post-secondary degree or training. It makes sense for students to see themselves attending college because their current long-term goals and plans demand it. Table 2 shows current career aspirations for each student.

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Career Goals and Plans</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Katherine</td>
<td>Physical Therapist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isabel</td>
<td>High School Counselor and School Administrator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosa</td>
<td>Elementary Education Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rico</td>
<td>Specific career not stated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benicio</td>
<td>Psychologist or Psychiatrist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allison</td>
<td>Medical Health Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diego</td>
<td>Specific career not stated</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although Rico and Diego did not specify a specific career goal, both students still stated that college was a part of their future plans. When asked about their long-term
goals and plans, Rico and Diego did not narrow in on a career; instead they offered big-
picture longitudinal responses. For instance Rico stated,

   In the future I definitely see myself going to college, and definitely completing
college, going all the way through. Getting a good job, starting a family, getting a
good house, the full lifestyle right there. I think I'd be… definitely furthering my
education, furthering my motivation, and keep going.

For Diego this means, “A place where I’m happy and I have a job. I’m secure with my
life.” Latino students in this IB DP program were all able to identify long-term goals and
plans. Whether or not they were able to point to a specific career, all were positive that
college was in their future.

   “…people come in the IB program to get challenged, and then also to be
prepared for college…” All participants expressed this theme in some way during their
interviews. Katherine and the additional six students were confident that the IB program
was preparing them for college. As a matter of fact, the majority cited this as their reason
for choosing IB. Although students admitted not understanding the program fully when
they first applied, they believed it was a good thing. Students knew - from its reputation
and the promotion of it - that IB would help them, as articulated by Isabel, “go to college
and be successful in college.” Isabel stated explicitly, “Like the whole idea of going
through this process, one of the main things that is explained like over and over again is
that this is preparing you for college…” When Rosa, the only senior in the study, was
asked if she felt IB had prepared her for college, she replied, “Yeah. That is 100%
accurate. IB has helped me so much. It taught me what I didn’t know about my myself
and what I was able to do.” IB pushed Rosa and as a result she learned how much she
was able to reach beyond what she believed were her limits. This led her to feel prepared for college.

“When a recruiter sees the IB diploma... they know that you are ready for college.” Along with preparedness, students also expressed that being in the IB program gives them an edge when it comes to the college application process. As a senior, Rosa had the most experience with the college application process. By the time Rosa participated in the series of interviews for this study, she had long been accepted by a university of her choice and was already focusing on getting ready for her transition. Even so she was able to provide a lot of insight into being an IB student going through the college application process. Rosa’s perception is that participation in the IB DP at Rydell High School made her a more attractive applicant to colleges. In addition to the quotation above, Rosa felt that there was a high demand for IB students from colleges based on the number of mailings and information she received. She arrived at this conclusion by comparing herself to a friend with similar grades, but not in the IB DP. When speaking to an advisor at the university she would be attending in the fall, Rosa heard, “You can pretty much do whatever you want here.” She attributed this confidence from her advisor to her participation in the IB DP:

Putting the IB program [on the application], they know that you’re ready, especially in any application, for college. They know that you’re ready to rise to the occasion and exceed any standards that the teachers have and put your 100% effort compared to regular kids or any other kid that wasn’t in the IB program. One of Rosa’s goals when choosing IB was to go to college, and in her eyes the IB DP did its job by getting her there.
Rosa’s experience with the college application process describes what the six juniors in the study expect as a result of listing the IB DP on their own applications. For example Isabel stated that she chose IB because she was told that in addition to being a good opportunity, the program would help her get into college. IB caught her attention even more when she heard that a local university - her top school choice - recognizes the IB program. Benicio reflected this same idea in his interview by saying, “[IB] gives us that international quality that makes us look better to more colleges… When you bring an IB kid into the equation, I think that makes students all the more wanted by colleges.”

The juniors in the study expect to be “wanted” by colleges and universities because of what the IB program represents. Students understand that there is a positive connotation attributed to the IB program, and they hope to reap the benefits of this during the college application process.

“‘Freshman year was a cake walk for all of us.’” Benicio reported hearing this from IB DP graduates visiting his high school as college freshmen. Another expectation students conveyed was the ease with which they will transition into college because of the IB DP. In addition to being prepared for college, the IB DP students in this study assume they will be successful their first year, and perhaps even find college easy.

Benicio for example could not believe it when he heard there were freshmen in college who did not know how to paginate a paper or use MLA format. He added, “Some kids struggle at writing a two hundred and fifty word essay. I can crank that out in maybe not even twenty minutes.” Knowing this made Benicio feel confident and ready for college.

Like Benicio, Katherine also heard stories from IB DP graduates about their college experiences being “non-stressful.” For Rosa, being in the IB DP program in high
school, “felt like I was in college the whole time” and that because she was done with IB, “I should be able to accomplish college also.” This indicates that she, too, presumed that the challenge of IB was the replacement for the shock of college-level coursework. Diego admitted that sometimes he questioned why he was in the program, but remembered “there’s a goal to my stress and I’m going to get somewhere with it. It all pays off.” Every single student articulated this theme of an anticipated delayed gratification. Along with this notion came a strong belief on their part that they are not only prepared for college, but that they will do well in comparison to their current and future classmates.

Sub-question 1b: How do Latino/a students perceive themselves academically, linguistically, and socially and how does IB contribute to their perceptions of self? The participants of this study possess high levels of academic identity and the IB program contributes positively to their academic self-perception. There is diversity in the group when it comes to linguistic perceptions of self, but students do have a desire to develop their Spanish. This was obvious notwithstanding dissonance that may be present due to mixed messages received by students about the value of Spanish. In terms of social perceptions of self, students see themselves as being family-oriented, which serves them as they navigate the IB program alongside their peers.

“It goes without saying, we are really intelligent people.” Although all the participants suggested this throughout the interviews, Benicio was the most candid. He made this comment in reference to himself and his IB counterparts. In terms of academics, all students alluded in some way to their high academic ability. Six out of the seven participants graduated from a gifted program prior to entering the IB program at Rydell High School. Three students attended a Chicago Public School (CPS) Regional
Gifted Center, whereas the remaining three attended the Academic Center housed within Rydell High School. The one student, who attended a CPS neighborhood school, reported only receiving As and Bs in elementary school as well as high scores on the Illinois State Achievement Test (ISAT). It was clear that every participant perceived himself or herself as possessing high academic ability. All described their intelligence as an intrinsic quality. The majority of participants consider themselves the intelligent ones in their families because they have been labeled as such, or they identified themselves in this way based on their academic accomplishments. In addition to intelligence, students recognized additional qualities that contribute to their academic achievement: motivation, hard work, and a love of learning.

Although students felt intelligent before entering the IB program, IB does play a role in their academic perception of self. For five out of seven students being accepted into the IB program at Rydell was something they felt proud of because it confirmed for them that they were capable of high levels of academic work. Rico and Benicio in particular recalled with a smile how impressed the IB coordinator was with their elementary school grades. For two students, though, it took a while to see the IB as a program of high-caliber. Katherine and Allison were both intent on attending a CPS selective enrollment high school, but were not accepted. They both struggled with having to settle for IB. As prospective freshmen, they viewed the IB program as less than the selective enrollment high schools they were hoping to attend. Both students admitted to coming around and changing their minds about IB.

Katherine, for example, admitted to feeling challenged by the academics and the workload. Success in IB made her feel like a “survivor.” This feeling was reinforced by
comments others made such as, “You’re in IB? Oh my gosh, I would not last a year in that.” This brought for her a sense of pride and the feeling that she was capable of accomplishing something others could not. For Allison the realization came as a result of participating in the program as well.

I didn’t know where Rydell stood in their IB program or how good we were. But, after seeing that, and after knowing what everyone in my class is achieving, what we do outside of school, what we do in school – wow! We are awesome as a group.

Being in IB became a positive experience for both Katherine and Allison as a result of the challenges and successes they experienced, the recognition from others, and the classmates that surrounded them. The academic self-perception of Katherine and Allison grew in a positive way through participation in IB. This happened in spite of their initial disappointment of not being accepted into selective enrollment high schools.

Katherine and Allison were not the only ones to experience an increase in positive academic identity after participating in IB. Although the rest did not see IB as second best, successful participation in the program reinforced their notion that they are capable, intelligent people. Students took pride in the work they engaged in and completed. They provided many examples of what they accomplished – enrolling in Advanced Placement classes in addition to IB classes, writing a 4000-word essay, discussions on global topics, and taking IB specific classes, such as the Theory of Knowledge course. The work required in IB contributed to students’ academic self-perceptions by making them feel smart. Rosa summarized this in the following passage:
My history teacher always told us that IB doesn’t change you, it just takes what you are and takes out whatever you’ve had that you didn’t know you had. For example, the 4,000-word essay, I didn’t know I had it in me to write a 4,000-word... to do those amounts of hours and research and to be so invested into something and feel so accomplished at the end. That feeling was so great when I turned it in and was done with it. Writing two essays in under 45 minutes, I didn't know I was able to do that. They taught me what I was able to do; I didn't know that about myself. IB helped me so much to learn about myself and to see what I'm capable of and if I could exceed my own capabilities to reach whatever I can.

IB validated students’ beliefs about themselves and empowered them because they meet the challenge of IB. All students reported feeling stronger and more confident as a result of being in the program. For the students in this study, the term IB denotes rigor and a challenge. The fact that they are able to complete the requirements and tasks of IB tells them that they have what it takes to be successful.

“I should definitely know my language before I know a different language. It’s just part of that whole sticking to your background.” In terms of linguistic perceptions of self, students varied in their responses. The one thing they all agreed on was that knowing Spanish was connected to their Latino/a identity. Diego’s quote above reflects the belief that participants in this study have on the importance of knowing Spanish because it is a part of their respective backgrounds and who they are.

The students in this study showed a range of linguistic diversity. Five out of the seven participants stated that Spanish was their first language: Katherine, Isabel, Rosa, Benicio, and Diego. For four out of these five students, beginning school not knowing
English or knowing very little was a memorable experience. Isabel and Rosa recalled being identified as English learners and being in a bilingual and/or ESL program of some sort. Their experiences with English and Spanish match that of simultaneous bilinguals because they learned and developed English, while maintaining their Spanish at home and, initially, through the Spanish heard at school. Katherine and Diego’s experiences with Spanish differed in that once they entered school and learned English; they grew more comfortable with speaking English in all areas of their life. Throughout their childhoods, exposure to Spanish continued through their family, which helped them maintain their receptive skills. Although they possess speaking skills in Spanish, Katherine and Diego expressed feeling much more confident when it comes to listening and understanding Spanish speakers. Benicio, too, felt more comfortable listening and understanding Spanish than speaking it. Although he stated that Spanish was his first language, he did not share the memory of entering school and not knowing English like Katherine, Isabel, Rosa, and Diego.

Rico and Allison both identified English as the first language spoken. Although both of Rico’s parents speak Spanish and most of his family is Spanish-speaking, he lives in a bilingual home where English is spoken in addition to Spanish. Rico admitted that while he understands it well, he is shy about speaking Spanish for fear of “messing up.”

As a child, Allison heard Spanish occasionally when she visited family on her mother’s side. As a Japanese-Puerto Rican American, Allison had a different linguistic experience. Her first language was English. She learned a few words in Spanish from her mother and some words in Japanese from her paternal grandmother. As a student of Spanish, Allison identified more with the non-native speakers of the language. Allison
did not point to skills in Spanish like the others did. Where she did merge with the rest of
the participants was when speaking about her reason for picking Spanish:

I didn't know what to pick, but then going back to picking Spanish, I'm like, oh
my gosh. I can relate to this because of where I came from and because of my
mom and because I've always wanted to understand it when I was younger, this is
my time to develop it.

For all of the students, the sentiment, “I can relate to this because of where I came
from…” was a common theme. Knowing and being able to use Spanish was a part of
their Latino/a identity. Students see the benefit of studying and maintaining their Spanish
for their future careers, but there is a personal component including a connection to
identity and communication with family members, especially older generations like
grandparents and for Benicio “everyone above the age of forty” in his extended family.

For this group of students, the IB program reinforces the value of Spanish by having a
four-year language requirement. IB contributes positively to students’ linguistic
perceptions of self by valuing something they value and bring to the program.

At the same time, students’ experiences in the IB program at their school points to
a contradiction between their linguistic abilities and placement in a Spanish class, which
is not aligned with their linguistic self-perceptions. For instance, even though they
acknowledge being fully bilingual, Isabel and Rosa were placed in a Spanish level one
class for non-native speakers of the language. Katherine, who shared that she is
sometimes asked to translate for teachers from English to Spanish, was also placed in
Spanish level one. This was also true for Rico, Benicio, and Diego who admitted to
having background knowledge in Spanish, high receptive skills and some social
language. All students started their language experience at level one when in fact it was only Allison who did not grow up in a Spanish-speaking or bilingual home and who also stated that she did not have the Spanish language skills that would have made a level one class too easy.

A final observation is that even though all of the participants spoke about the importance of knowing Spanish, the majority of students were also able to point to a moment in their childhood when they realized the importance of knowing English. Katherine, Isabel, Rosa, Rico, and Diego all expressed this. Diego for instance remembers feeling excluded as a Spanish speaker in pre-school because he was unable to communicate with all of his classmates. Rosa recalled only being able to speak to Latino students at her school. Rico, who started school knowing English, felt as a child that he had an advantage over the students who did not speak the dominant language.

When I entered school and English being my first language, it was easier to talk to everyone and communicate with the teachers because at my old elementary school the bilingual kids seem to have a lot harder time trying to make friends, or talk to the teachers or do the homework because they had to have all of their work be communicated or translated for them.

For Allison, English would not be the language sacrificed. Speaking of her father, Allison said, “He didn’t want me to not learn English because that was really important. He thought that if I was exposed to people who really didn’t know how to speak English, that I wouldn’t know how to speak it perfectly.” English as the language of power is a perception that students picked up on at an early age. Students understood that success was gained in the English-speaking world. Those who were in a bilingual and/or ESL
program at an early age and those who were observers did not see the program as a positive.

“To be successful in IB actually takes a couple of characteristics… definitely try and be social.” Rico and all others spoke about the importance of being social with classmates in the IB program. They referred to their IB classmates as family. Benicio was adamant when advising future IB students to “treat [your IB classmates] as though they were your own brothers and sisters.” By “them” he was referring to classmates in the IB program. Rosa concurred by stating, “The IB program is being a family…” The word and concept of family came up time and time again as students described the IB social sphere.

Students feel very connected to the IB group because they share a common goal: to be successful in IB. Furthermore, they understand what each one is going through and enjoy being a part of a group where students are alike. Allison and Benicio expressed feeling similar to other students in IB. Benicio shared that the similarities and closeness of IB students makes them look like “snobs” to non-IB students. They may be seen as snobs to others outside of IB, but within IB students are accepted and they share a bond.

In addition to this sense of belonging, treating each other like family leads to success in IB. The participants interviewed provided many examples of IB students helping each other throughout the program with homework and academics and even emotional support. Rico’s quote above reflects this. Success in IB for Rico and the others is partially connected to how well they get along with other IB students because they understand that a demanding program requires a strong support system. Katherine recounted a situation when she received help from another IB student:
Meeting new people also helped me academically. That person, she helped me revise some of my essays. She would always get really good grades and I would get decent and I'm like, “What am I doing wrong?” and she's like, “If you want I'll read some of your essays and see what you're doing wrong.”

Rico talked about helping his IB classmates:

…if people are having trouble with their work I will try to help them out if they are not understanding. I will try to explain it to them. I always help people find the easier way out, but not struggling so much to the point where they are stressing out and pulling out hairs. Try to make it a little bit easier on them.

All students agreed that having close ties to their IB classmates was beneficial for them academically and emotionally. Isabel spoke about supporting her classmates by reminding them to not stress out and remain calm. Rico and Benicio remembered seeing a fellow classmate cry and then talking with her to reduce her stress level about IB. In addition, Allison also stated feeling motivated by her IB classmates. For more than half of the students, the IB bond was even stronger amongst the Latino/a IB students at Rydell. Katherine and Allison attributed this to their shared cultural experiences. Rico and Benicio attributed this to a similar cultural upbringing and similarities in their families as well. Rico expressed, “…at the end of the day I can rely on other Latinos, those are like the closest people.” Both young men added that there is not as much “drama” amongst the Latino IB students; instead they both felt that there was a close support system. Latino students shared inside jokes related to the culture and understood each other’s close relationships with family members.
All students concur that there is little time for socializing outside of the IB program; however they do believe it is important. Social time outside of school on weekends and holidays is spent with the nuclear and extended family. Students reported feeling very close to parents, siblings, grandparents, cousins, aunts, and uncles. All talked about being close to family and the importance of valuing the family. For Rosa IB took the biggest toll by infringing on her family time. She recalled many times when she had to pick her IB work over spending time with her loved ones, which was very difficult for her. A benefit of having close family ties at home was that students were able to transfer that family-oriented value to the IB program environment.

After spending time with both home and school families, students have very little time left for other activities. Rosa was the only one to say she held a part-time job. When it came to sports, five out of the seven students had played a sport at some point during their high school years, but Katherine was the only one to be on a varsity team. (While she is close to her teammates, Katherine did not hesitate to confirm that she feels closer to her IB classmates.) Allison made the choice to leave track when it became too demanding, and Rosa described being unable to concentrate while playing soccer. She remembered making “To Do” lists in her head related to IB schoolwork instead of focusing on the game. Isabel remained active in Latin Dance Club throughout her years in IB because she enjoyed it very much and it afforded her the opportunity to participate in Rydell’s International Night. The other extracurricular activity that most were a part of was the International Baccalaureate Student Leadership (IBSL) club.
Research Question 2

What beliefs do Latino/a students hold about how the IB DP at their school acknowledges their academic, linguistic, and social needs to ensure that they are college and career ready?

Participants identified elements of the IB program that promote, are ineffective, or could better promote their academic, linguistic and social success. Students were better able to articulate aspects of the academic and social components than for the linguistic.

Sub-question 2a: What elements of the IB program do Latino/a students identify as promoting their academic, linguistic, and social success? Academically, students felt that their IB teachers, coordinator, and counselor, as well as the international framework for the IB curriculum were elements that promote their academic success. Students pointed to the four-year language requirement as an element that promotes their linguistic success. Finally, students stated that leadership and networking were the elements of the IB program that promoted their social success.

“I think it’s our teacher.” This statement made by Katherine was a resounding theme present in all of the student interviews. Students identified most of their IB teachers, as well as the IB coordinator and counselor, as reasons why they are successful in the IB program at Rydell. While students mentioned the rigorous curriculum and structure of the program at Rydell, all of the Latino students in this study identified the IB staff as an element of the program that promotes their academic success because they implement the rigor and create the structure of the program. Throughout their interview series, students spoke quite favorably of several IB teachers. As Rosa stated, “The teachers are great resources that are offered in IB.” She went on to say, “The teachers
have sort of shaped how I’ve learned,” and felt that the teachers were “very, well, awesome.”

Students provided myriad examples of what their teachers do to engage them and help them access the rigorous content. Allison talked about her biology teacher ending the class with Bio News or stories related to the topic or the teacher. For Allison what IB teachers do in class is “having to learn but having that little fun while doing it.” Students enjoy the challenging coursework of IB when the teachers make the class engaging. They also liked being pushed to their full potential because they knew the teachers were there to help them. When asked, students were quick to respond that they felt supported by their teachers in Rydell’s IB program. Several talked about feeling comfortable asking teachers for help. All students recalled receiving individual help from teachers outside of class at some point. Having eighth period lunch, the last period of the day, for IB students and IB teachers facilitated receiving this extra help. Students also shared that teachers offered tutoring sessions for them outside of class, which they appreciated. Another thing that teachers did that was important for students was to remind them that the program, as competitive and challenging as it is, is really about learning.

A teacher that was brought up by the majority of participants was a particular history teacher. Students reported being engaged, challenged, and supported in this class. Katherine explained that in this class, students are expected to support all claims with evidence. The material is presented to students through packets instead of the traditional textbook. Katherine described it in this way, “she helps us learn the material with her methods and with the packets that she gives us, and then we’ll have seminars so we can clarify and bring up new ideas on that certain topic.” In addition to this, Katherine also
spoke of the atmosphere in the class calling it “laid back” and a place where students have to push themselves at the same time. For some students, this particular teacher was an important adult in the program because she understands the struggle of the IB student and considers their demanding workload when planning for her class.

Isabel made an overall observation about her teachers that pointed to their knowledge of IB. She like the others values her IB teachers and believes that the ones at Rydell are “obviously different than other teachers in other schools.” She felt this because according to Isabel, the IB teachers at Rydell are experienced and know “all the tricks about IB” including “ways to earn points that you need.” By this Isabel meant that IB teachers at Rydell understood the IB rubrics and help students understand what is being evaluated in the assessments. Isabel and the rest of the students acknowledged that their IB teachers were experts in their content, but it is important to note that students are also gauging whether teachers are experts in how to help them succeed in IB.

In addition to their IB teachers, students also spoke very highly of the IB coordinator and IB counselor. Students identified these two individuals as people who were very invested in their success. Students received help in preparing for the ACT and applying for college from their IB counselor. Katherine described the counselor as the “backbone” for students in IB. Diego spoke of the counselor as a “built-in support” and felt comfortable approaching her and speaking with her. The IB coordinator also came up often, as a resource and person who helps students understand the college application process. In addition she is the one who shares opportunities with students and hears their new ideas. Students appear to trust both very much. Isabel noted that they understand Latino students:
I think like that’s one of the jobs that a counselor has, like to try to understand everybody and like see the different points of view and things like that. They do that at least in my school. Like in Rydell, they understand that because there are a lot of Hispanics there and a lot of people who haven’t had that experience that college-like oriented family, I guess…. Our school does recognize that and I see it a lot of times.

When it comes to guiding Latino students through the college application process, the students feel the IB coordinator and counselor do.

A final point to be made about the IB staff at Rydell is that some students see them as part of the IB family, too. For instance, Allison has a majority of her teachers’ phone numbers and feels comfortable reaching out to them for help. As she stated, “we share a bond over two years.” When speaking of the IB coordinator, Allison enjoyed growing closer with her, laughing together, and having fun. For others like Rico and Benicio, teachers are more than teachers; they are also mentors.

“I think in the IB program we take moments to examine other countries around the world, so I think it is doing its part as an international program.” Another element that students identified as promoting their academic success was the international aspect of the IB program. This is reflected in Rico’s statement above. Participants understood internationalism to be a major descriptor and purpose of the IB program. Internationalism was seen in two ways. First of all, students liked that the IB program is recognized around the world. For them this meant that they could trust they were in a good program that promoted their academic success.
Secondly, students also used internationalism to define the curriculum of the program. Internationalism used in this sense by the participants described a multicultural curriculum. Allison summed it up, “I think that IB is all about culture, multi-culture.” For students, the multicultural curriculum brought a sense of recognition. Katherine experienced this when she talked about reading *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* by Colombian writer, Gabriel García Márquez in IB English class. She noticed that Latino students benefitted because they possessed background knowledge that made the book more comprehensible. Rico spoke about this as well. He enjoyed reading *Bless Me, Ultima* by Chicano author, Rudolfo Anaya, because he was able to relate it to himself and his family. Rico drove this point home by saying, “It’s like the IB program and my family values how they’re coming together.” Rosa recounted her experience in her IB Latin America History. It was an eye-opening experience for her because she learned of the contributions of Latinos.

Because of the focus on internationalism, Latino students in this study also felt that they had something to contribute to the program that was valued. Isabel expressed this in the following statement:

I think when we talk about internationalism and stuff like that, my heritage does play a role in it because I speak a lot about my heritage and I do tell people about my heritage and about where I come from and things like that and it's important for everybody to know like where everybody comes from and so I think IB focuses on it. I feel that they do focus on where you come from and like who you are… because I am able to express myself in a way that like other students might not because of where I come from….
Isabel felt comfortable sharing her cultural background in IB because she received the message that it matters in the program. Katherine, Rico, Benicio, and Allison shared similar thoughts and examples of times they felt comfortable sharing or contributing to the curriculum. Allison made the latter point most clear by saying:

We're all about culture, and mixing kids together from different backgrounds. Take the same curriculum, learn the same thing, but we all have something different to bring to that curriculum. I think we make that curriculum, definitely. I know in history, our conversations always veer from what we're trying to talk about because people had those opinions, and that perspective from where they came from. Definitely.

For a student to assert, “I think we make that curriculum, definitely,” is a strong indication that students feel recognized for their cultural identity and the experiences they bring from home. For Allison and others it provides student ownership of the curriculum. Various examples were provided, too, of ways in which classmates of different backgrounds contributed to learning in IB classes. Examples include: Polish students speaking about World War II, students from Vietnam offering insights on the Vietnam War, an Arabic-speaking student explaining references in the book, Woman at Point Zero by Nawal El Saadawi, a Ukrainian student sharing with the class why she came to the United States, and a student talking about his grandparents’ life in Cuba while studying the Cuban Revolution. The examples shared by students point to the notion of cultural responsiveness in the IB curriculum. Again, Allison was eloquent in summarizing this concept, “We all have a story, and that story is never forgotten because we're in IB. Teachers are aware, we're all aware. That's our living, breathing resource, we're all a
resource to people who want to know more.” An important note to make is that students talked about this mostly in the context of their English and History classes.

The participants in this study mentioned the internationalism of IB frequently because this element made them feel that their perspectives were recognized and valued. Latino students reported seeing themselves and their classmates in the curriculum. Students conveyed that the internationalism of IB promoted their academic success.

“I think it's really important to have four years of a language…” For the linguistic component, students pointed to the four-year language requirement as an element that promotes their academic success. This requirement was very important for Benicio and all of the participants. They appreciated this about the IB program because they saw this element as one that supports the internationalism of the program, which they believe promotes their academic success as well. For Benicio specifically, learning another language is important because it is the space in which another culture can be examined. He articulated that this is important to do regardless of whether or not the opportunity is in a heritage language. Isabel and Allison also discussed studying and knowing another language as an element that promotes their future career success. Their thinking is that knowing another language, especially Spanish, will be of value to add to any organization they might be a part of in the future.

“IB students are always like leaders.” For all students, the focus on leadership is an element of IB that promotes their social success. All spoke about being leaders and learning to become leaders, and how they have taken on this role in the IB program. Students agreed it was IB the program that pushed them to see themselves in this way.
Isabel, as quoted above, shared that IB students are encouraged to take on leadership positions. She also stated that:

They always want to see that you are a leader. The fact that we can always take a lead in something and we do what we really want to do. Like we strive to be like our type of success, and so just knowing that and also them teaching us that it's important to like make your own decisions and to not be so much of a follower, but like set your own standards and things like that and make your own decisions and lead somewhere wherever you are.

Leadership was a theme throughout Isabel’s interviews. It appeared very important for Isabel to embody leadership as a Latina IB student. For her it meant creating a new club – the International Baccalaureate Student Leadership (IBSL). Isabel proposed the idea to the IB coordinator at Rydell. Once it was approved, she moved forward with her idea and became the president of the club. Every single student in this study was a member of this organization.

“When we got there it was all IBs, so it was kind of cool to be with them.”

Another element of IB that students recognized as one that promotes their social success was the chance to network with other IB students as Allison expressed. Allison, Katherine, and Isabel were offered the opportunity to participate in the IB Summer Academy at a local university. There they met and interacted with other high school IB students during the summer. All three students enjoyed and valued this experience because they realized that IB made them a part of something bigger than the program at Rydell. They also understood that this came as a result of being in IB. Allison liked that all students were able to speak the same IB language. There was comfort in not having to
explain IB acronyms, such as TOK for Theory of Knowledge. Being able to meet more of their peers whom they perceived to have similar abilities and backgrounds because they, too, carried the IB label was a plus for Allison, Katherine, and Isabel. Although Rosa did not participate in summer program, she spoke of something similar. IB promotes social success for the simple fact that you are part of an international network.

Sub-question 2b: What elements of the IB program do Latino/a students identify as ineffective in promoting their academic, linguistic, and social success? Students found it difficult to identify elements of the IB program that were ineffective in promoting their academic, linguistic and social success. Instead, students pointed to instances of inefficiency that were the result of not abiding by the intended structure, as they perceived it.

“I don’t know, I think everything was tailored to us pretty well.” Without a doubt, students spoke overwhelmingly of the positive characteristics of the IB program at their school. Rico and the six other participants agreed that the IB program at Rydell was working; however, they also presented examples of situations or times where they felt the program could better promote their academic, linguistic, and social success. As a matter of fact, some statements and suggestions made even appear to contradict a few of the elements that students reported as promoting their academic, linguistic, and social success in the IB program at Rydell. Although students pointed to their IB teachers and the internationalism of the program as elements that promote their success, they also noted these as areas for improvement. These were more indicative of elements of the program that could improve or better promote their academic, linguistic, and social success.
Sub-question 2c: How do Latino/a students think the IB program could better promote their academic, linguistic, and social success? Students discussed four areas that if improved could better promote their success in the IB program. These were teacher training and experience in IB, increase in culturally responsive curriculum, and appropriate placement in the Spanish language class. In addition, students offered advice to current and future IB students that will help them to better promote their social success.

“I felt we needed to have someone with experience...” In the area of academics, five out of seven students spoke of the importance of having trained IB teachers and informed staff members. Students indicated the need for experts in the content area as well as teachers trained in IB who had experience. Students recalled a class with an inexperienced teacher who did not have IB training. Even though students were understanding of the new teacher, they were disappointed with the class. They did not feel the class addressed their needs. For students, the IB training for teachers is important because they want teachers who will expose them to the IB assessments and rubrics at an early stage. Students do not want to wait until the Diploma years (11th and 12th grades) to see the rubrics for the first time. One student asked, “Why didn’t you teach me this before? Why weren’t we doing the rubric before?” This comment refers to the IB rubrics used to evaluate the IB assessments.

Participants also communicated that all staff at Rydell, regardless of whether they teach IB or not, should have an understanding of the program. Isabel, Rosa, and Allison stated this desire explicitly. Rosa and Allison shared that they did not feel valued by non-IB teachers. Both students also worried about the recent decision to convert the school
into a wall-to-wall IB school. One of their concerns was that staff members teaching outside of the current strand of IB did not understand, appreciate or believe in the mission of the program.

“…there was very limited perspectives of our cultures.” When asked about elements that promoted academic success, students were adamant about naming internationalism as one of those. They provided many examples of how this manifests itself in the IB program in a way that is culturally responsive to students of all ethnicities and races. On the other hand, Rosa, Benicio, and Rico conveyed that they wanted and needed more. Rosa believed that her classes could have included more of the Latino perspective. With the exception of her Latin American History course taken senior year, she felt, “There wasn’t really an aspect of my culture in the history.” Benicio stated that he wanted to study more of the culture and customs of other countries in addition to the history, or the language, as is the case with Spanish. For Rico what is lacking in the program is cultural sensitivity and awareness. He stated that there were times during class when students laughed or made jokes about personal family experiences he shared rooted in historical events. He wished that his classmates would take these conversations more seriously because he had something to offer from which they could learn.

“I could have been placed in a much higher class...” All students started their language experience at Rydell at level one of Spanish as a world language, and all, except Allison, acknowledged that their Spanish classes were easier for them than their classmates. As heritage or native speakers, being in a class with students who were learning greetings did not meet their needs. Some students added that even in Spanish II they didn’t learn much. Another student shared stories of helping classmates who did not
speak Spanish and then getting a “death stare across the room” from the teacher. Allison who felt like a true novice in Spanish also offered her perspective on this. She was frustrated to have students with a background in Spanish in her class “because when you say something, you’re not even done writing it and they’re already shouting out the answers.” She did not agree that students with this level of Spanish knowledge should be mixed in the same class with non-native speakers. Although the heritage and native speakers of Spanish enjoyed the benefit of their linguistic capital, the majority recognized that they could have been better placed. Accurate placement was an element that could better promote students’ linguistic success.

“Sometimes we really do have to sacrifice the time that we spend with our friends or with our family.” Students did not explicitly state that IB was ineffective in promoting their social success. As discussed previously, instead they identified how IB promoted it. What they did state was that the demands of the program interfered with their social life outside of school. Time with family and friends not in IB was sacrificed due to the workload of the classes and requirements of the program. Katherine put it simply, “IB impacts my social life, a lot.” Students did not have recommendations for the program at their school on how to better promote their social success in this area. Students accepted this as part of being in the program. Instead, they had advice for prospective IB students and that was to manage their time wisely. All students agreed that time management skills were critical for academic and social success in the IB program.

Summary

The goal of this study was to examine the experience of self-identified Latino/a students in an IB DP in a Chicago Public High School. Seven students agreed to
participate in this study. Participants were interviewed using a phenomenological approach over three separate times at the end of the 2013-2014 school year. Throughout the interview series, students described their long-term goals and plans along with their academic, linguistic, and social self-perceptions. To this they added how IB has contributed to their visions and experiences. Furthermore, students discussed their beliefs about how IB and their school contributed to their academic, linguistic, and social success. Students were able to identify various elements that promote their success, but unable to say that something about the program was ineffective. They were much more comfortable stating that there were elements that could be improved to better promote their academic and linguistic success. In terms of social success, students applied an internal locus of control and offered a recommendation to future IB students.

Several themes emerged when students were tasked to make meaning of their experiences in IB. The participants in this study expressed great confidence that they would pursue a post-secondary education. They believed this to be true and that IB would help them get there as well as prepare them for college success. When speaking of their academic self-perceptions, students showed high levels of academic identity, which were reinforced through their acceptance and success in the IB program. Linguistically, students saw themselves at different ability levels, yet all expressed a desire to develop their Spanish language skills. In the area of social self-perception, students saw themselves as being family-oriented in nature.

Beliefs about the role of IB in promoting their success were overwhelmingly positive. Students attributed academic and linguistic success to IB staff, the internationalism of the program, and the four-year language requirement. Socially,
students felt the program promoted their success by teaching them to be leaders and encouraging them to take on leadership roles. Another element of the program that students attributed to social success was the opportunities for networking that result from being an IB student. Overall, students were very happy with their experience in IB, and found it difficult to speak of elements that were ineffective in promoting their academic, linguistic, and social success, but they were able to point to elements that would further promote their success. They believed that all IB teachers should have training in IB and that all staff in the school should understand the program. While they enjoyed and identified the internationalism of IB, they wished to see more of this type of curriculum. To better promote their linguistic success, students spoke of appropriate placement in their Spanish language class. Finally to better promote their social success, students believed that prospective students should practice managing their time wisely while in the program.
CHAPTER V
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This final chapter presents a summary of the study and the major findings of the previous chapter. Findings related specifically to Latino Critical Theory are also discussed. Finally, the conclusions section includes implications for practice and recommendations for further research on the International Baccalaureate (IB) Program.

Summary of the Study

Overview of the Problem

The International Baccalaureate (IB) Program was first introduced to the Chicago Public Schools (CPS) in 1980 with the launch of the program at Lincoln Park High School (Lincoln Park High School, 2015). Seventeen years later in 1997, Paul Vallas, then Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of CPS, added 12 more IB programs at the secondary level (Schlesinger, 2012). The last wave of IB has come as recently as 2012 under the administration of CPS CEO Jean-Claude Brizard and Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel. In the last two years a dozen IB programs have been added at the secondary level across CPS (CPS, 2012a).

Although it has taken over three decades, the program has grown exponentially in CPS. Policymakers have pointed to local research describing the success of IB (Coca et al., 2012; Roderick et al., 2009) to justify the expansion of the program in recent years. What this research has also told us is that students participating in IB programs at the secondary level in CPS are mostly African American and Latino students with a slight
overrepresentation of Latinos. Thirty-eight percent of students in IB are Latino/a and many identify as first-generation in the U.S. In spite of the success experienced in IB measured through preparedness for college, students also report facing issues of low social capital and support (Coca et al., 2012).

In addition to the challenges specific to IB, historically Latino/a students have faced many obstacles in the United States. These include: living and attending schools in high-poverty areas, lack of access to highly-qualified teachers, lack of access to college preparatory courses, underrepresentation in gifted programs, low expectations from teachers, high levels of segregation, parents with low household incomes and low education levels, unmet instructional needs for English Learners and English Learners with disabilities, high mobility, racial and ethnic stereotyping and undocumented immigration status (AFT, 2004; Education Trust, 2003; Gándara, 2004, 2005, 2010; U.S. Department of Education, 2011). Unfortunately, the structure of the U.S. educational system has either contributed to these challenges for Latino/a students or ignored them (La Roche & Shriberg, 2004) resulting in fewer opportunities for Latinos and lower levels of attainment of the proverbial American Dream. For this reason, it is imperative to look closely at educational reforms, such as IB, that target Latino/a students, a growing population in the U.S. (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010), to determine if and how the needs of this traditionally underserved population are being met.

**Purpose Statement and Research Questions**

The use of IB as a reform effort in an urban, diverse setting like CPS that serves a high number of Latino/a students needs to be examined. The growth of the program and the population it serves begs us to ask what about the program is effective or needs to
improve to ensure that Latino students are college and career ready. Looking at Latinos/as separately allows us to capture the unique strengths and challenges faced by this group.

For the students participating in this research a potential benefit was being able to reflect on their experiences and understand themselves better as learners. This study also aims to benefit the participants and other IB students by helping educators, administrators, and policy-makers in Chicago understand the experiences of Latino students in the IB program and by providing ideas for enhancing the program. To explore these topics the following research questions were posed:

1. How do Latino/a students in an urban setting make meaning out of their experiences in an IB DP program?
   a. What are Latino/a students’ long-term goals and plans and how does IB fit into their visions?
   b. How do Latino/a students perceive themselves academically, linguistically, and socially and how does IB contribute to their perceptions of self?

2. What beliefs do Latino/a students hold about how the IB DP at their school acknowledges their academic, linguistic, and social needs to ensure that they are college and career ready?
   a. What elements of the IB program do Latino/a students identify as promoting their academic, linguistic, and social success?
   b. What elements of the IB program do Latino/a students identify as ineffective in promoting their academic, linguistic, and social success?
c. How do Latino/a students think the IB program could better promote their academic, linguistic, and social success?

**Review of the Methodology**

To answer the research questions proposed in this study I chose to follow a qualitative method with a phenomenological approach. The research design was a case study. Using phenomenology as an approach allowed for participants to make meaning out of their experiences and to tell their own counterstories as proposed by LatCrit Theory. Therefore, current Latino/a students in an IB program to interview them for the purposes of this research. The primary data were in-depth interviews. Data were collected during June of 2014 at the end of the 2014-2015 school year. Seven students from a CPS high school referred to as Rydell High School in this study agreed to participate in a series of three interviews. Although the interview questions were open-ended and semi-structured, there was a planned progression to the interviews as recommended by Seidman (2006). The interviews were formatted in the following manner: (a) Interview One - Focused Life History; (b) Interview Two - The Details of Experience; and (c) Interview Three - Reflection on the Meaning. Interviews took place approximately one week apart. Six out of the seven participants completed the three-part interview series, and one student participated in the first two interviews only.

The technique used to interpret the interview information was the data explicitation procedure. After the transcription process, interviews were coded by following Moustaka’s (1994) data explicitation procedures recommend for phenomenological research (Creswell, 2006; Merriam, 2009; Seidman, 2006). To explain the phenomenon studied here, I followed these steps:
1. Horizontalization – Look for statements and quotes that explain the experience of the participants.

2. Clusters of meaning – Categorize the statements that stand out during the horizontalization stage and develop themes.

3. Textural description – Describe in writing the experience of the participants.

4. Structural description – Use the textural description to explain how the context affects the experience of the phenomena for the participants.

5. Composite description – Combine the textural and structural descriptions.

   This part focuses on the essence of the experience of all of the participants.

**Major Findings**

**Academic.** The Latino/a students who participated in this study shared their experiences in the IB Diploma Program (DP) in a CPS high school referred to here as Rydell High School. Each set of interview series by the seven participants and data explicitation processes led to several findings. One of these was that the Latino/a students in the IB DP program at Rydell High School hold a positive academic identity. This finding in itself is important because traditionally in the U.S. there has been a belief that Latino students are intellectually inferior, which unfortunately has been corroborated by researchers and practitioners (León & Holman, 2002). Despite this challenge, the students in this study received the message that they possess high intellectual ability and as a result they have acquired a positive academic identity. The role of the IB DP is critical here because it reinforces the affirmation for this group of students. Additionally, the IB DP contributes to the setting and attaining of ambitious future career goals and the planning of how to achieve those goals, such as attending college and working in
professions that require post-secondary education and training. The students in this study feel that IB will help them attain their short-term and long-term goals due to its rigorous curriculum and high expectations for students.

Another finding was that students appreciated the internationalism of the IB DP curriculum. Students find this component of IB very appealing because their cultural background is valued in the program. Participants believe they have something to contribute to the program because of their Latino heritage, and they deem themselves to be contributors to the IB DP curriculum at Rydell. Student ownership of this type is powerful because it enriches the learning experience of students and increases student support of the IB DP at Rydell. For the participants of this study, the internationalism of the program facilitates culturally responsive teaching.¹ Students reported several instances when they felt their diverse experiences and those of their non-Latino/a classmates were represented in lessons. However, students also shared that the curriculum and teaching could be enhanced to be more culturally responsive. Although it was clear that an underlying tenet of IB, i.e., internationalism, is present in the curriculum at Rydell this was only to a certain degree. Based on the examples shared by students, the inclusion of diverse voices seems at times coincidental in the curriculum. While teachers include various perspectives in their units that make it conducive to supporting culturally responsive pedagogy, student voices appear spontaneously during discussions in class, and are not necessarily integrated intentionally into the curriculum.

¹Culturally responsive teaching is defined by Gloria Ladson-Billings (1994) as pedagogy that acknowledges and values the inclusion of students’ cultures in the learning process.
Linguistic. An aspect of the IB DP that students appreciate is the language requirement. Participants identified this as an important element of IB because it is aligned with the internationalism of the program, and it is a place to discuss and examine culture making this another opportunity to offer a culturally responsive curriculum. Students also cited their Spanish class as important because it is a space where they can connect to their Latino identity.

Latino/a students in this study entered the IB program with varying levels of Spanish language ability. Six out of seven possess background knowledge in Spanish as native speakers or heritage speakers. In spite of this, students were all placed in a level one Spanish class for novice learners of the language when they entered the IB program at Rydell. Some students were later moved to a higher level of Spanish, but continued in classes with non-native and non-heritage speakers. Although being in a class for novice learners proved advantageous in terms of grades, students admitted that Spanish was an easier class for them than it was for their non-Spanish speaking peers and they could have been placed in a higher level Spanish course.

Social. According to the students interviewed for this study, the IB DP at Rydell is successful in promoting their social success. While a previous study by Coca and colleagues (2012) of CPS IB DPs reported issues of low social capital for students. Latino/a students at Rydell reported receiving support in this area from the staff at Rydell. Students were very complimentary of the IB coordinator, the IB counselor, and their IB teachers who offered opportunities for leadership, relationship building and networking inside and outside the walls of their high school. For the students in this
study, the social capital they had as part of the IB DP was a key factor in promoting their success in the IB DP.

Another social element that promotes the success of students is their relationship with classmates in the program. IB DP is demanding because of its rigor, expectations and workload. A recurring theme with the students in this research was the need to treat each other like family to survive the demands and stressors brought on by their participation in the IB program. Students reported receiving and providing help to one another throughout their years in the program. They also expressed an understanding that this support system built in by the students was crucial to everyone’s success. For the Latino/a students in this study, creating a family atmosphere felt natural because it was an extension of their home families, immediate and extended, with whom they reported being very close.

To summarize, students had many positive things to say about the IB DP at Rydell High School. They enjoy the program for the value it places on internationalism and culturally responsive teaching and learning. They are confident the IB DP will contribute to the acquisition of their future college and career goals. Latino/a students in this study feel recognized and validated in the program. Like the study conducted by Coca and colleagues (2012), students appeared to face issues of low social capital outside of the program, but were given this support by the IB staff members at Rydell. Students also relied on their own funds of knowledge, or resources acquired from their families and homes (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & González, 1992). To achieve success in the IB DP, Latino/a students made use of their aspirational, linguistic, and familial capital, which are components of community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005).
Findings Related to Latino Critical Theory

The main theoretical framework employed in this study was Latino Critical Theory or LatCrit. The elements of LatCrit were used to structure the study. For instance, this study focused on the experience of Latino/a students in the IB DP as an acknowledgement of the intercentricity of race, racism, and ethnicity. The commitment to social justice came from the desire to inform CPS educational policy in the midst of widespread implementation of a reform effort. An interdisciplinary perspective was taken by using interviews and counterstorytelling as the main data source for the research. The research approach was phenomenology, which also supported the element of centrality of experiential knowledge. In LatCrit, the life experiences of Latino/a students are key. By using phenomenology, counterstorytelling, and data explicitation, the accounts of Latino/a students were highlighted. As an element of LatCrit Theory, counterstorytelling played a central role because it gave voice to those who are often marginalized: Latino/a students. Also, through counterstorytelling, Latino/a students showed their eagerness to tell their own story because they had much to share about their lived experiences. It was clear that students wanted to be heard and that they were excited to provide input.

Another crucial tenet of LatCrit is to challenge the dominant ideology of programs and organizations. This study was designed to allow for this through its emphasis on the narrative of Latino/a students. The interview data though did not reveal the aforementioned. Instead students were overwhelmingly positive when it came to speaking about the IB DP. Moreover, their rhetoric represented dominant ideology, which requires some attention here.
The first sign that students had adopted the dominant ideology of the IB DP program at Rydell High School was their reluctance to respond to research question 2b, which asked them to identify elements of the IB program that were ineffective in promoting their academic, linguistic, and social success. Students were able to pinpoint areas of improvement, but could not commit to saying that any aspect of the IB program was completely ineffective. This made complete sense because as members of the IB DP, the program had worked for them. The evidence for the students was that they had remained while others had left before entering the diploma years. Students felt successful and accomplished because they had made it. They believed that they had what it takes and some expressed that those no longer in the program lacked motivation. The students identified strongly with IB and embraced this part of their identity fully because of what the program represents, primarily intelligence and diligence. Until very recently, most IB programs in CPS have been selective for which students must apply. This alone maintains the dominant ideology of meritocracy for which student success is a result of individual attributes and ignores the fact that historically, schooling in the U.S. has not been responsive to the educational needs of Latino/a students as well as other marginalized populations.

Along these same lines, students took issue with the adoption of a wall-to-wall IB program at their school. The message they had received by applying, being accepted, and sticking with the program was that there was something unique about them that others did not have and they bought into this thinking because they benefitted from it; they were special. Because they saw themselves in this way, they expressed frustration when teachers outside of IB did not value them. Students did not question whether the structure
of IB as established at their school was ever set up to intentionally promote learning for all Latino/a students. Instead they lamented that students would be in the program that did not possess the qualities of an IB student and that this would negatively impact the program.

Throughout the series of interviews, the Latino/a students who participated in this study expressed other ways in which they had adopted the ideology of the dominant culture through their schooling, including the IB program. When stating their long-term goals and plans, students relayed their aspirational capital and also a mainstream notion of future job success, such as career goals and plans pointing to white-collar, middle-class occupations. Another example is that although students valued the Spanish language, they understood that English was the language of power. This was learned early on in their lives, but the IB program as implemented at Rydell reinforced this dominant thinking by not recognizing the linguistic capital of students during the Spanish language placement process or in their classes.

Examining student responses through the LatCrit lens is necessary because it adds another finding to this dissertation. Certain aspects of the current implementation of IB at Rydell High School contribute to dominant ideology through the implicit and explicit messages received by students that reinforce objectivity, meritocracy, and traditional definitions of intelligence and success. At the same time, students are adopting a view of power that does not necessarily reflect their cultural background and funds of knowledge. The responses of students in this study indicate that IB as it is currently applied does not consistently challenge dominant ideology, but instead reinforces it in many ways.
Conclusions

Implications for Practice

Educational reform efforts targeting Latino/a students have struggled with being consistently effective (Trueba & Bartolome, 1997). Various researchers assert that this is due to the lens used by educators and policy-makers to examine Latinos in education. Unfortunately, the approach has been to define the challenges of Latino/a students through a deficit view (Moll et al., 1992; Trueba & Bartolome, 1997; Yosso, 2005). Researchers such as, Moll and colleagues (1992) and Yosso (2005), criticize the notion that Latino/a students walk into our schools lacking resources, and propose instead that they possess funds of knowledge and community cultural wealth. The findings of this dissertation support this claim, because the IB DP students interviewed offered many examples of how they use their funds of knowledge and community cultural wealth to succeed in the program. For example, students demonstrated that they hold aspirational capital (“the ability to maintain hopes and dreams”), linguistic capital (“intellectual and social skills attained through communication experiences in more than one language”), and familial capital (“cultural knowledges nurtured among familia [kin]”) (Yosso, 2005, p. 79). Therefore, I propose that when studying IB or other reform strategies affecting Latinos, researchers move away from a deficit model to a strengths-based model.

A strengths-based approach should also be applied to school programs, like the IB DP, and classrooms. If schools approach the education of Latino/a students in this way, the result will lead to changes that will have immediate benefits for students. In the case of IB, a program that values language and cultural learning, it makes sense to acknowledge the linguistic capital that some Latino/a students hold. Schools can do this
by ensuring appropriate placement of students in language classes that result in further
development of their native or heritage language. When students walk into a school
building proficient in Spanish, educators need to offer them opportunities to capitalize on
that skill. For Latinos who are native or heritage speakers of Spanish, this means access
to Advanced Placement (AP) Spanish classes at earlier grades, creation of Spanish
courses beyond AP Spanish, and even third language learning options. Specific to the IB
DP, this would mean offering students with a background in Spanish the chance to study
Spanish at the higher level (HL) as opposed to the standard level (SL).\(^2\) IB DP requires
students to take at least three HL subjects (IBO, 2014). For Latinos in an IB DP program
who know Spanish, this is a place where they could shine and feel confident about a skill
learned at home, which in this circumstance also gives them an academic edge in the
program. Another option would be to offer a dual language program within IB so that
students have the choice to enroll in content classes in Spanish. A combined dual
language IB program promotes the internationalism of the curriculum and promotes the
development of academic language in Spanish. All of these opportunities recognize the
linguistic capital of students.

Knowing that the students in this study reported using familial capital to create a
support system is also important information for educators. The IB DP, as reported by the
participants, is a demanding program that can lead to high levels of stress. When students
use their familial capital to create a family environment in their schools to manage the
pressure of the program, we need to recognize this as an asset for this student group. First

\(^2\)SL subjects are those that equal 150 teaching hours, while HL subjects equal 240
teaching hours (IBO, 2014).
of all, this gives us good information about students’ social-emotional states and their coping mechanisms. Also, this gives us ideas about the supports we can provide in our buildings. Schools can create systems modeled after the caring behavior of students to offer support. Furthermore, this is another strength that we can tap into in our classrooms to ensure success of all students. In addition to the nurturing aspect of familial capital, this particular type of community cultural wealth includes creating a sense of community around history, memory, and culture (Yosso, 2005). For instance, having a student with a strong sense of community about the history, memory and culture of Cuba is an asset to any classroom, but it is especially fitting in an IB program. To recognize this strength by intentionally integrating it into the IB curriculum, thereby giving the student greater ownership of the curriculum is culturally responsive teaching, and has the potential to be empowering for students traditionally marginalized in classrooms. As educators, we must actively plan for culturally responsive teaching by knowing our students and identifying their strengths. Moreover, it needs to occur in all classes, not just the humanities. As an organization, the International Baccalaureate Organization can encourage educators to make the curriculum more culturally relevant through their training and professional development opportunities.

A final implication for practice resulting from this study is that the voice of Latino/a students needs to be heard to certify that reforms, such as the IB DP, promote their academic, linguistic, and social success. In this case, students were confident in stating that the IB DP at Rydell High School is serving them. On the other hand, they also expressed ways in which the program could better promote their success. This study makes it clear that Latino/a students are able to articulate clearly what works and what
can be improved in their schools to better meet their needs. Speaking to students regularly and surveying them should be a component of all reform efforts. Program evaluations need to include the student perspective to get a better sense of what students are getting out of a program, and to gain an awareness of their specific goals and needs.

**Recommendations for Further Research**

A recommendation for further research is to continue studying the IB program and other reform efforts serving Latino/a students from their student perspective. This study looked only at a small group of Latino/a students in one CPS high school. Seven students participated in this study, which is appropriate for qualitative research, but small when compared to the number of students participating in the IB DP in CPS, and the IB Middle Years Program. Expanding this study beyond one school now that IB has been adopted in more schools across CPS is a viable way to build off of this initial study. Just as there are lessons to be learned from Rydell High School, replicating this research in other schools will also offer insights specific to those contexts. Researchers and educators can look for commonalities among the experiences of Latinos/as across the program as well as discrepancies between sites. Most importantly, Latino/a students in IB programs at other schools also deserve to be heard.

Another recommendation is to consider the voices of Latino/a students who left the IB program before entering the DP years. All of the participants here were students who flourished or grew in IB as freshmen and sophomores and transitioned successfully to the DP. It would be informative to hear the perspective of those students who chose to exit IB, and as a matter of fact, the advent of wall-to-wall IB high schools in CPS makes
it necessary for educators to understand why a Latino/a student would decide to transfer out of the IB program.

A third recommendation is to study the relationship between language and identity for Latino/a students. In this study, students brought up the importance of knowing Spanish as a Latino/a, because identifying as a speaker of Spanish goes beyond communication. This means that equal attention must be paid to the bicultural aspect of language in addition to the bilingual and biliterate components. Future research needs to examine this topic and the role of IB in the development of adolescent bicultural identity.

As an organization that values an international curriculum, does it do enough for students’ personal growth in light of equity? Does the IB program prepare Latino/a students to tell their counterstories? In other words, we should be asking if a program that serves minority racial and ethnic youth is preparing them to ask questions of themselves and society that will challenge the status quo, or if it “prepares” them by teaching them to align themselves with the status quo. This theme was not within the scope of this study, but it should be explored in the future.

Finally, I would like to recommend that future research explore the experiences of African American students in IB. In CPS, African American students also participate in IB at a high rate (Coca et al., 2012). Similarly to Latino/a students, African American students have also been subjected to challenges in U.S. society and countless educational reform efforts (Payne, 2008). It is imperative that we hear the counterstories of African American students as well to look for specific needs that schools should meet.
Concluding Remarks

By sharing their counterstories, the Latino/a students who participated in this study articulated and made meaning of their experiences in the IB DP in a CPS high school. Students expressed how the IB DP program at their school promotes their academic, linguistic and social success. They also shared ways in which the program could better promote their success. Additionally, participants spoke of ways in which they use their linguistic and familial capital to be successful in IB. For educators this is a reminder that Latino/a students possess strengths that we should tap into in our classrooms, because these assets can lead to academic achievement. To do this we need to use a strengths-based approach rather than a deficit approach when working with Latino/a students. Lastly, when it comes to reforms we need to stop treating Latino/a students as the subjects of the latest trend. Instead of telling the story of what works for Latinos, we must make room for their voice by providing the space for them to tell their counterstories. This has the potential to take successful reform efforts like IB and enhance them further to ensure their continued success in adapting to the students they are intended to serve.
APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW QUESTION BANK
Interview ONE: Focused Life Histories

1. Tell me about your family and the neighborhood where you grew up.
2. What do you do outside of school? Who do you spend time with in the evenings and on the weekends?
3. Talk to me about your language experience. What was the first language you remember speaking? What does that mean for school?
4. What grade school did you attend? Tell me about some of your experiences in grade school?
5. How would you describe yourself as a student?
6. How did you get into the IB program at Rydell HS?
7. How did you find out about the program?
8. What does it mean to you to be a Latino/a?
9. Can you give me some examples of when you’re connected with your culture?
10. How has your Latino/a identity impacted your life? Your schooling?

Interview TWO: The Details of the Experience

1. What is the IB program?
2. Describe your experience in IB at Rydell HS.
3. Can you describe the IB curriculum and requirements?
4. What effect has the IB experience had on your life?
5. What have you learned from IB?
6. What activities and lessons have you enjoyed?
7. How much time do you devote to the program?
8. Do you ever feel pressure or stress as a result of being an IB student?
9. Describe a week that was particularly hard.
10. Describe a week you really enjoyed.
11. What supports, if any, do the teachers and/or school offer you in the classroom and outside?
12. Do you feel supported? Why or why not?
13. Do you feel that your individual needs are met? Why or why not?
14. Do you believe there is room for flexibility in the curriculum? Do you believe that the program accommodates students with different cultural backgrounds or learning styles?
15. As a Latino student, what do you have to offer to the program? Do you believe that this is acknowledged?
16. IB requires that students study a language. What language did you pick and why? What level are you in and is it appropriate for you?
17. How are the language needs of bilingual students met in your language class and all your other classes?
Interview THREE: Reflection on the Meaning

1. Why do you think students choose to participate in the IB program? Why did you choose to participate in IB?
2. Has the program met your expectations?
3. What sacrifices, if any, did you have to make in order to attain your diploma?
4. What benefits do you believe you will have as a result of participating in IB?
5. Where do you see your life going and how does IB fit into that?
6. What role, if any, does IB play in helping students reach their college and career goals?
7. How prepared do you feel to apply for and attend college?
8. What advice would you give to a high school student who is considering enrolling in the IB program?
9. What does it take to be successful in the IB program? Do you believe you have been successful?
10. What support systems and coping mechanisms do students rely on in order to succeed in an IB program? Students, teachers, parents, coaches, etc.
11. Do you believe that the IB program at Rydell HS is working? Provide examples.
12. Have you ever felt that you needed something different from the program because your needs were different?
13. What role has your Latino identity played as you’ve participated in the IB program?
REFERENCE LIST


CPS students in the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme. Chicago, IL: Consortium on Chicago School Research at the University of Chicago.


VITA

Sandra Flora Arreguín is the daughter of Francisco Arreguín and María Cruz Medina. She was born in Rincón de Tamayo, Guanajuato, México on January 26, 1978. She grew up in Chicago, Illinois with her brother, Nelson. Sandra currently resides in Chicago, Illinois with her husband, Roberto Montoya, on the same street where she lived during most of her childhood and all of her adolescence.

Sandra attended Catholic elementary schools and a public high school. She graduated from DePaul University in Chicago with a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology and a minor in French. In 2003, she earned a Master of Arts in Education also from DePaul University. Sandra began her Doctor of Education program at Loyola University Chicago in the fall of 2006 while continuing to work as a full-time teacher. In 2010, she completed a General Administrative Certificate program at Loyola University Chicago.

Sandra has worked in the field of education for the past 12 years. She began her career as a Chicago Public Schools (CPS) high school world language teacher, and later became the World Languages Department Chair in the same school – Taft High School. While in CPS, Sandra also held positions as Senior World Languages Professional Development Specialist and High School Bilingual/ESL Specialist in the Office of Language and Cultural Education. Additionally, she worked as Assistant Principal at Roosevelt High School. In 2013, she accepted a position as World Languages Chair and Director of English Learners at Highland Park High School located in a suburban school district.
Sandra currently works as Principal of Northwood Junior High School in Highland Park, Illinois. Her favorite pastimes are reading, shopping, watching films, traveling, and spending quality time with her husband and close family and friends. She enjoys learning new things and has a great appreciation for creativity and the arts.
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