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# Connecting Teacher Efficacy Beliefs in Promoting Resilience to Support of Latino Students

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## Abstract

This article explores the connection of teacher self-efficacy beliefs in promoting student resilience to teaching practice and support of Latino students. Results suggest that efficacy beliefs related to resilience are linked to building important relationships through connecting with students, building on their experiences and knowledge, and understanding the issues they confront. In particular, important to strengthening the academic resilience of Latino students are teachers' views of their use of Spanish as an asset in their learning as well as the sensitivity teachers displayed around the added stressors Latino students face, such as discrimination and immigrant status.

## Keywords

high school, Hispanic students, urban education

In urban schools with large working-poor and low-income Latino populations one challenge is to help students remain academically engaged despite the presence of difficult situations and obstacles. Like their mainstream peers, in

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order to be academically successful, culturally diverse students must engage in educational persistence. However, by and large, unlike their mainstream peers, culturally diverse students often must persist while lacking school and community resources (Kozol, 1992), with apathetic teachers (Fine, 1991), and with low institutional and pedagogical expectations of their success (Anyon, 1980, 1981; Kozol, 1992). At a time when urban minority students seem to be consistently, and persistently, perceived as having deficits that impede them from academically learning or advancing (see Archer, 2008; Ferguson, 2000; Gonzalez, 2005) and low expectations seem to impede their progress (Delpit, 1992, Valenzuela, 1999), it is, more than ever, important to build on what can be learned from teachers who believe in students' abilities and successfully teach them. With respect to supporting educational development of the largest growing youth minority in the United States, we must focus on teachers who support Latino students' academic resilience.

Academic resilience, defined here as the capacity to cope with difficulty and remain academically engaged, is heavily influenced by the relationships teachers build with students (Kenny, Gallagher, Alvarez-Salvat, & Silsby, 2002; Masten, 2001; O'Connor, 1997). In studies that focus on the success of marginalized students, there is strong evidence that teachers with high self-efficacy are more apt to develop supportive relationships with students, teach more challenging academic work, and have higher expectations (Ashton, Webb, & Doda, 1982; Lee & Smith, 1996; Payne, 1994; Tucker et al., 2005). Such support and expectations, in turn, promote student self-efficacy and the willingness to persist in their efforts. This suggests a need to turn our attention to teachers who not only support student achievement but also support students' continued efforts to keep trying when difficulties or obstacles arise. Thus, the guiding question for this work asks: What behaviors and practices of teachers with high self-efficacy support Latino high school students' resilience?

This work is important for three reasons. First, there is little work specifically considering the influence of teachers with high efficacy, on Latino students' resilience. With Latinos as the increasing largest student population (Ramirez & de la Cruz, 2002), it is important to begin documenting ways that teachers have been successful in supporting engagement and achievement for these students. By focusing on teachers who work in a school whose population is almost exclusively Latino, we complicate our understanding of highly segregated schools as closely connected to failure and inequality (Donato, Menchaca, & Valencia, 1991). As this work indicates, there seem to be a number of teachers who work closely with students and who seem to influence students' school commitment. Second, there is little work that focuses on urban teachers' perspectives regarding their work

with urban students. Often, when urban teachers are participants in research, the focus is on how they contribute to the underachievement of these populations (Anyon, 1981; Fine, 1991; Smith & Smith, 2009; see also Gutiérrez, Rymes & Larson; 1995; Valenzuela, 1999). More work needs to highlight efficacious, urban teachers whose purpose is to support minority students' continual and persistent ways of engaging in school, along the lines of work by Nieto (2003) and Ladson-Billings (1994). We concur with Gutiérrez and her colleagues that more work is needed that goes "beyond simply underscoring and, therefore, glorifying the way in which "minorities" are oppressed and marginalized" (p. 448). By focusing on a highly segregated Latino school, we can understand, more fully, how teachers are able to attend not just to the everyday stressors that all students experience but also how they help students cope with, and address, secondary stressors (Alva, 1991) such as racism and language discrimination that Latinos in particular encounter. Third, this work aims at clarifying the link between teachers' self-efficacy and student resilience. Stark statistics such as student low graduation rates, high drop-out rates (Ramirez & de la Cruz, 2002), and high psychosocial levels of stress (Alva, 1991; Alva & de Los Reyes, 1999) suggest that this link is important, especially for Latino populations.

Because research on teacher efficacy has been criticized for not taking into consideration the context under which efficacy beliefs operate and the behaviors they influence (Pajares, 1992), we are interested in focusing more directly on how teachers' sense of efficacy influences the interactions believed to enhance students' capacity to overcome obstacles. This is important because of strong evidence that suggests that teachers are major players in influencing student resilience (Doll & Lyon, 1998; Kenny et al, 2002; Knight, 2007; Masten, Coatsworth, & Douglas, 1998; Newman, 2002, Wang, 1998; Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1990). Since resilience refers to the protective factors that influence student persistence and engagement in school, and it can easily be argued that not all teachers successfully promote resilience, it may be possible to consider teachers with a high sense of efficacy, around this construct, to see how they positively influence this process. We may do this by assessing efficacy beliefs through what teachers say they do and through observing the relationships, activities, and practices they carry out in the classroom. Since there is strong indication that self-efficacy influences teaching actions and efforts that affect student learning (Bandura, 1993; Milner & Woolfolk Hoy, 2003; Soodak & Podell, 1994), including resilience (Shaughnessy, 2004), we must expand our understanding of what this entails.

In order to connect teacher efficacy and student resilience, we turn to the literature on self-efficacy and student academic resilience. These two

frameworks are linked through the importance of interpersonal relationships. More clearly, teachers with a strong sense of self-efficacy tend to engage in supportive and beneficial relationships with students (Ashton et al., 1982; Jerald, 2007; Payne, 1994; Tucker et al., 2005). In turn, student academic engagement and continued effort is largely influenced by positive and supportive relationships with teachers (Franquiz & Salazar, 2004; Luthar, 2006; Stanton-Salazar & Spina, 2003). Teachers' self-efficacy influences both teaching behaviors and perceptions of students; these two aspects ultimately influence student outcomes (Ashton et al., 1982; Pajares, 1992; Pang & Sablan, 1998).

In the following sections, we first discuss the literature pertinent to this work regarding efficacy beliefs and student academic resilience. Our review also draws from studies that focus on urban poor, minority, or marginalized students since there are, at present, few studies that focus on resilience of Latino students and teacher self-efficacy. We then provide a context for the study and the analytic procedures in the Method section. The results offer evidence that links teachers with high self-efficacy to behaviors that support student resilience. Finally, some conclusions and implications of this work are discussed in the last section.

## **Review of the Research**

Teacher self-efficacy can be defined as teachers' belief in their skills and ability to positively influence students' learning and outcomes (Ashton et al., 1982). Bandura (1993) asserts that in order to successfully carry out a goal or task, a sense of efficacy, along with the required knowledge and skills, is needed. In fact, individuals with a high sense of efficacy challenge themselves by setting high goals and continuously putting forth effort to achieve those goals (Pajares, 1992).

Teachers' sense of efficacy has been consistently related to student academic outcomes (Pajares, 1992). When teachers believe that they can influence learning, their interactions and relationships with students seem to reflect such beliefs. Specifically, efficacy beliefs are thought to have a direct effect on teachers' behaviors toward students and teaching, and an indirect effect, by virtue of teachers' actions, on the students they teach (Jerald, 2007).

### *Influence of Student Perceptions*

Various factors and contexts can influence a sense of efficacy. For teachers, such influences include students, colleagues, administration, and overall

school environment (Ashton et al., 1982). For example, what teachers believe about students' capabilities also influences their beliefs about their success in teaching them. Some teachers may hold beliefs, in their ability, to help certain types of students learn, for example those students who are in honors courses, but not those in lower-track courses (Tucker et al., 2005). Students' cultural and ethnic backgrounds may also affect teachers' sense of efficacy. Pang and Sablan's (1998) survey of 175 pre- and in-service teachers suggests that racial attitudes regarding African American students affected teachers' beliefs about their own ability to teach these students. Teachers' negative perceptions of students, and assumptions about their community, led to teachers feeling incapable of successfully teaching African American students. Previous work supports the notion that teachers' opinions and perceptions of minority students can be a determining factor in the amount of time and emphasis placed on teaching them (e.g., Patterson, Hale, & Stessman, 2008) and on how they are viewed even when they are successful in school (Archer, 2008).

Payne (1994) looked at the relationship between teachers' efficacy beliefs and the outcomes of poor African American and Latino junior high school students. In her study, seventh and eighth graders rated their teachers as significant or less significant. Payne found that teachers considered "significant" (based on teaching behaviors, practices, and beliefs about their students) valued their interactions with students, believed in the ability of all students, and "were unequivocally positive about their students" (p. 193). Significant teachers also exhibited high expectations and were aware of students' academic and emotional needs. In contrast, Ashton and her colleagues (Ashton et al., 1982), who looked at specific differences between low- and high-efficacy teachers in terms of their interactions with students, found that teachers with low efficacy tended to engage in, arguably, a form of discrimination. That is, they paid less attention to their students, indicated their low expectations, and heavily focused on managing students in response to perceived threats of students' likelihood of disrupting learning.

Discrimination and low expectations also extend to students with learning difficulties. For example, Soodak and Podell's (1994) research showed that when faced with the case of a student who had learning difficulties, teachers with a high sense of efficacy suggested different prevention strategies than those with low efficacy. Teachers with a high sense of efficacy suggested more prevention strategies that they could implement in the classroom and suggested, less often, a need for outside evaluations and interventions (which can lead to special education placement). Although teachers with low efficacy were able to provide suggestions regarding prevention strategies, they tended to doubt the effectiveness of their suggestions and

their own ability to successfully carry them out. This is important to note because if teachers do not believe in the effectiveness of practices and interventions, or in their own ability to effectively implement such strategies, then they are less likely to use them.

### *Influence of School Environment*

Further proof of the contextual nature of efficacy beliefs is provided by the work of Lee and Smith (1996), which suggests that in schools where most teachers take responsibility for student learning (as opposed to placing blame for failure on students) and where there is cooperation and support among school staff, students not only learn more, there is also a less considerable gap, with respect to differences in student learning, among students with diverse backgrounds. Lee and Smith emphasize that when teachers take responsibility for students' outcomes, it is because of their beliefs in their ability to help all students learn.

Overall, the work discussed so far indicates that teachers with a high sense of efficacy are able to build supportive relationships and hold high expectations of their students. Next, we discuss how the resilience literature emphasizes relationships among teachers and students as necessary in promoting students' ability to remain academically engaged when faced with difficulty.

### *Student Resilience*

The academic resilience literature emphasizes teachers as a main sphere of influence in students' school experiences and continued engagement. Student academic resilience relies largely on teachers' practices, including forming caring relationships, building a positive learning environment, and creating established classroom routines (Doll & Lyon, 1998; Kenny et al., 2002; Knight, 2007; Masten et al., 1998; Wang, 1998; Wang et al., 1990). It also relies on teachers' interactions with, and beliefs in, the capabilities of students (Delpit, 1992; Nieto, 2003; Noddings, 1992). As noted previously, teachers with a high sense of efficacy much more readily tend to build positive learning environments, positive expectations, and positive relationships with students than those with low self-efficacy. For minority students in urban communities, such practices and relationships seem to be especially beneficial, often serving as a buffer to institutional and social barriers (Franquiz & Salazar, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Perez, 2000; Stanton-Salazar & Spina, 2003; Stipek, 2006; Valenzuela, 1999).

Student academic resilience is a dynamic process of coping with challenges and stress (Johnson, 2008; Masten, 2001; Wang et al., 1990) that allows and promotes students' deeper engagement (including interest, motivation, and perseverance) in school (Newman et al. as cited in Cefai, 2004) and social-emotional competence (Pianta & Walsh, 1998). Because resilience is dynamic, students' ability to use protective mechanisms or "resilient" traits when confronted with problems or obstacles (Winfield, 1994) is viewed as "changing over time and situations, dependent on, and specific to, the contexts embedded in children's lives" (Cefai, 2004, p. 151). This suggests that resilience is a process that can be nurtured and strengthened, throughout students' lives (Pianta & Walsh, 1998; Winfield, 1994). Teachers' actions and interactions can, then, be viewed as positive interventions that serve to augment and promote students' protective processes during specific stressful times and instances.

*Resilience and Latino students.* Teachers' attitudes and behaviors affect students' own sense of efficacy and engagement in school. As Payne (1994) asserts, "This teacher-student connection is meaningful in all instances because teachers are in control of so many variables that create motivation and achievement such as: task, content, social organization, activity choice, and material resources" (p. 182). A number of researchers on resilience have described additional sets of challenges that make ethnic minority student success particularly difficult (Borman & Rachuba, 2001; Luthar, 2006). For example, challenges specific to the healthy and positive development of Latino children and adolescents include racism and discrimination (Alva, 1991), segregation and inhibiting environments (García Coll et al., 1996), and structural barriers (Holleran & Waller, 2003). Just as damaging, the chronic implicit message that "no one cares" received by students in urban schools can have serious implications for their identity and academic success (Valenzuela, 1999).

Alfaro and her colleagues (Alfaro, Umaña-Taylor, Gonzales-Backen, Bámaca, & Zieders, 2009), using discrimination as a risk factor to resilience, examined the effects of discrimination on academic motivation and success of Latino adolescents. Their work indicates that for male adolescents, discrimination is associated with lower academic motivation and grade point average (GPA), suggesting not only the outcomes of discrimination but also alluding to the possible "self-fulfilling prophecy" of low expectations and lack of effective teaching practices.

Martinez, DeGarmo, and Eddy (2004) surveyed Latino and non-Latino middle and high school students about the supports or hindrances to school success. Their findings suggests that Latino students, more than their



non-Latino peers, are likely to experience discrimination, limited access to important adults, and feeling unwelcomed in school. Despite the support that teacher–student relationships can provide, these supports are often absent from students’ experiences in their schools and communities, leaving them to cope on their own with added challenges of institutional and systemic barriers (Stanton-Salazar & Spina, 2003).

Stanton-Salazar and Spina (2003), for example, emphasize the importance of relationships between working-poor youth of Mexican descent and adults (including teachers). Such key relationships help promote the “acculturation styles and coping strategies that moderate the effects of racial segregation, economic marginality, and institutionalized racism” (p. 233). Overall, studies such as the ones discussed above seem to suggest a link between discrimination toward minority students and lower levels of academic engagement (Wong, Eccles, & Sameroff, 2003) and an increased chance of dropping out (Martinez et al., 2004; Valenzuela, 1999).

## **Limitations Addressed in Current Study**

Research indicates that support intended to strengthen students’ resolution to overcome social and structural obstacles must be founded on effective teaching practices (Doll & Lyon, 1998; Masten et al., 1998; Waller, 2001; Wang, 1998; Ware, 2006) and, specifically for minority youth, must include high academic expectations that facilitate student academic performance (Delpit, 1992; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Levin, 1987). Of importance is the understanding that the practices carried out in the classroom are often those that teachers believe will be successful and that they feel fully capable of implementing (Soodak & Podell, 1994). Although most of the studies discussed here have helped researchers and teachers consider the link between efficacy beliefs and actions, there are some limitations that need to be addressed in order to more fully understand and characterize this relationship. First, most of this work has resulted from the use of quantitative tools, such as surveys. This mode of inquiry may limit understanding of how the context of the schools and the interactions and relationships between teachers and students are moderated by the efficacy beliefs of teachers. Another important limitation in the current literature is in assessing an overall sense of efficacy that has the potential to reduce assessment of efficacy to general teacher self-perceptions (Pajares, 1992). That is, self-efficacy beliefs need to be assessed with more specificity, focusing in particular on teachers’ classroom activities associated with their beliefs. With this in mind, the goal

of this article is to explore the connection between teachers' self-efficacy beliefs around promoting resilience and the coping strategies they emphasize through relationships and interactions with urban Latino students. In particular, this work seeks to answer the following question: What behaviors and practices of teachers with high self-efficacy support the academic resilience of Latino students?

## Method

This research was conducted at Alamosa High School (all names are pseudonyms) in 2007. Alamosa is an urban high school located in Northdale, a densely populated Mexican American working-class community located in a large, Midwestern, city. This school was chosen because of its large population of Mexican American students. The year this study was conducted (2006-2007 school year), the population of Hispanic students at Alamosa was 92.7%. Of the approximately 1,690 students who attended during the school year, 97.2% were from low-income background and 13.5% were English language learners (<http://research.cps.k12.il.us/resweb/schoolqry>).

The data used in this article were drawn from data from the first author's dissertation work that explored the perceptions of 10 effective teachers regarding the practices and strategies they believed supported student academic resilience. In order to determine which teachers were considered to be effective in the school, teachers and students in their senior year completed a short survey to nominate teachers. Specifically, the survey asked the participants to provide the names of three teachers who they would consider most effective in supporting student learning and overall student success. The survey was worded specifically to attend to the literature that identifies the principles of supportive relationships and effective teaching practices as major influences of student resilience (Dryden, Johnson, Howard, & McGuire, 1998; Johnson, 2008; Wang et al., 1990) and continued academic engagement and success (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994). The respondents were also asked to briefly explain why they chose those particular teachers for nomination. The written responses provided an opportunity to explore the criteria by which "effective teachers" are identified. Thus, the study participants were determined to be efficacious teachers through a total frequency count of nominations from both teachers and students. The teachers with the most nominations were interviewed and observed to further understand the beliefs, practices, and interactions with students that made these teachers "effective."

## *Participants*

The 10 nominated teachers who participated in this study form a diverse group. Five women and five men, with teaching experience ranging from 7 to 20 years. Besides their relatively long time in teaching, all of them expended considerable time in after-school programs and teams. Their involvement with after-school activities allows the teachers to spend more time with students. Such school-related activities after school have been shown to be successful mentoring experiences for racially diverse adolescents (Langhout, Rhodes, & Osborne, 2004; Rhodes, Grossman, & Resch, 2000).

Of the 10 teachers nominated, 7 are white, 2 are Asian American, and 1 is Hispanic (see Table 1). Overall, the racial composition of the teachers at Alamosa is similar to that of the large school district in which the school is situated: African American: 29.7%, White: 49.7%, Latino: 16.1%, and Asian/Pacific Islander: 3.6% (<http://research.cps.k12.il.us/resweb/schoolqry>). These numbers, both in the school population and in the study, are similar to other findings that indicate the majority of teachers in the United States are White and middle class in terms of race/ethnicity and socioeconomic status, respectively (Ladson-Billings, 2000).

## *Instruments*

Classroom observational field notes served as a way to document teacher support of students and to describe the academic culture of teaching. The goal was to gain a deeper understanding of the beliefs and practices teachers perceived as influential in promoting and supporting students' well-being and success. Each of the 10 nominated teachers was observed for one full class period. Circumstances permitted three of the teachers to be observed twice. Field notes from classroom observations were used to supplement and extend impressions of teacher "effectiveness" that were provided in the survey nominations of the 10 teachers.

Teacher interviews, each lasting approximately 1 hr, were also conducted. The interviews were comprised of questions generated specifically for this study as well as items used in previous research.<sup>1</sup> The interview protocol sought to uncover (a) beliefs about the process of teaching, values that drive pedagogy, and self-efficacy; (b) effective teaching practices applied in the classroom; (c) specific strategies employed to help students through tough situations and conditions; and (d) perceptions about the roles that teachers take on. Reliability of teacher responses was enhanced by using within-method triangulation (Denzin, 1970), which consists of asking more than one question centering on the same concept. For example, three questions focused on teachers' self-efficacy. All

**Table 1.** Description of Teachers

Teacher	Ethnicity	Subject/content area	Years teaching at Alamosa/ years teaching overall	Participation in school community
Mr. Brown	White	History	6/6	Head of Student Government Council
Ms. Ellis	White	English as a second language (ESL)	4/6	Sponsor of the Aztec Club; head of the ESL department
Mr. Fitz	Hispanic	Art	9/9	Sponsor of after-school art projects; member of the Local School Council
Ms. Lowell	Asian American	Language arts	14/14	After-school English tutor; member of the Scholarship Fund Committee <sup>a</sup>
Mr. McDaniel	White	Math	9/9	Sponsor of the girls tennis team; After-school math tutor
Mr. Murry	Asian American	History	20/20	Sponsor of the history fair <sup>b</sup>
Mr. Perse	White	Language arts	3/10	Athletic director; football coach
Ms. Peterson	White	Language arts	4/7	Head of the Yearbook Committee; head of the English department (1 year)
Ms. Ross	White	Science	9/9	Girls softball coach
Ms. Smith	White	Science	4/4	Member of the Local School Council <sup>c</sup> ; girls softball coach

<sup>a</sup>This committee holds fundraisers to award monetary gifts to graduating seniors of the school.

<sup>b</sup>A yearly event in which students put on displays connected to history and compete with other schools.

<sup>c</sup>Local school councils (LSCs) are the site-based management team of each school. LSCs' primary responsibilities include selection and renewal of contract of the school's principal and development of the school improvement plan.

interviews were conducted and transcribed by the first author, thus further ensuring data accuracy and vigor. A record of each interview was created through note taking, audio recording, and transcribing the interview conversation. The transcriptions provided the raw data for coding as well as exact quotations to effectively demonstrate findings.

## Analytic Procedures

Analysis of data, guided by the literature on self-efficacy and resilience, included careful repeated readings of each interview focusing on passages relating to self-efficacy beliefs and the interactions and practices discussed as helpful in building student resilience. Analysis across interviews helped to identify patterns, recurring ideas, and descriptions pertinent to these two constructs and to establish themes. The analytic codes, including the ability to influence school engagement and practices used in this endeavor, were applied to the interview passages to identify perceptions of teachers' ability to strengthen student resilience and the practices and interactions teachers believe are beneficial in achieving this goal. Themes were then identified within coded passages from interviews. Classroom observational field notes served to confirm the major findings from teacher interviews and topic patterns that emerged during the focused coding. Two major interrelated and overlapping themes, *developing caring relationships*, and *establishing academic expectations and support*, were derived from this analysis. In order to unpack the complexity of teacher support in promoting student resilience, we discuss these two themes (establishing relationships and expectations) separately. To explore the relationship between teachers' sense of efficacy and their instructional practices and interactions with students regarding resilience, we analyzed teachers' efficacy beliefs around this construct. In addition, we analyzed teachers' responses to student dilemmas and observed teachers engaged in classroom teaching. The analysis suggests that teachers' overall positive beliefs regarding their ability to influence student resilience is instrumental in predicting their use of effective teaching practices as well as their positive interactions and support of students and their responses to student situations.

## Establishing Teachers' Sense of Efficacy

We begin this section with the claim that the 10 teachers are not only considered effective by teachers and students in the school but that they also have high self-efficacy with respect to their ability to support students in the school. This view is largely supported by teachers' responses to the interview questions around their teaching practices, beliefs, and ability to support student resilience. For example, from the very first question in the interview process (i.e., why they decided to go into teaching), the study participants described their ability to help students. As Ms. Smith explained, "That's what I wanted to do, because I felt that the students in underdeveloped

areas needed good teachers and somebody to believe that they could go to college because I grew up in a similar situation.” Ms. Ross and Mr. Fitz emphasize similar beliefs.

I just really liked the high school age, how articulate kids already were but still seeking to have direction and guidance and wanting that in their life and I felt like I had some gift at providing that so I thought, well, I could become a teacher. (Ms. Ross)

You do whatever it takes to reach out to them, and this setting as a teacher you have so much you can do—if you truly and firmly believe you can offer some hope and offer support for them. (Mr. Fitz)

Based on their comments, it is clear that teachers self-reflexively positioned themselves as “effective” by emphasizing what they brought to teaching, that is, certain beliefs, values, and talents that support student learning and overall well-being. They also indicated a belief that what they bring to working with students is different, or lacking, in other teachers. In exploring how teachers talked about and represented ways in which they helped their students to remain resilient, it became evident that they saw themselves as strong, effective teachers and that they believe in their own abilities and in the capabilities of students. In particular, teachers pointed to two aspects as instrumental when supporting students to remain academically engaged: relationships and expectations. More specifically, teachers interacted and developed meaningful relationships with students and set high academic expectations while providing concomitant support. These two important aspects of supporting students will be examined in detail in the next section.

## **Supportive Relationships**

In the interviews and observations, the importance of relationships was clearly emphasized. Both casual and emotionally closer relationships seem to support academic resilience (Gilligan, 2000; Johnson, 2008), and teachers who are able to develop such relationships with students tend to be those with high self-efficacy (Ashton et al., 1982). This is important because it is only through teachers and students knowing each other beyond simply instructing or experiencing instruction, that trust, which is indicative of caring, develops (Franquiz & Salazar, 2004; Noddings, 1992; Valenzuela, 1999). Caring, particularly for culturally diverse students facing difficulty and disengagement from school, is vital to their perseverance (Perez, 2000).

The words and actions of teachers seem to support this position and provide specific examples of what this may look like.

Teachers with high efficacy interact with students in respectful caring ways. These “ounces of respect,” as Ms. Peterson described them, start from the moment kids step into the classroom and include saying good morning, learning students’ names early in the school year, asking students about their well-being, and being attentive. Their interactions with students are not only based on the lesson or curriculum but are also subtly formed through natural, mundane, conversations and banter. For example, teachers were observed catching up and chatting with students before and after class. Most of the teachers in this study greeted students as they walked into the classroom or acknowledged them as a class. On a Monday morning, Ms. Peterson stopped a student and asked, “Did you get a haircut?” When the student nodded, she said, “It looks good.” On another occasion, as students filtered into Mr. Brown’s 10th period class, two students stopped next to him and began talking about the Miami Heat’s (a professional basketball team) season record. After class, the same students, indicating their knowledge that Mr. Brown is a fan of the Spurs (a professional basketball team), teased him about the fact that the Spurs were losing games. And in Ms. Smith’s chemistry class, while collecting money for a field trip at the beginning of the period, she casually told her students that she would be spending it instead of putting it toward their trip. In a longer exchange observed, one student indicated that the word “homely” was found twice on the vocabulary hand-out they were going over. Mr. Perse loudly responded, “Did you call me homely? Are you calling me homely?” The students laughed and the student replied in a slow, calm voice, “No, I’m saying the word is written twice.” Mr. Perse continued with this play, “So you’re saying I’m handsome?” Kids laughed again and the same student replied, “No, I’d be lying if I did.” His classmates laughed again, and Mr. Perse conceded, “Good answer.”

At first glance, these exchanges may seem part of the everyday routine of schools. However, research on student disengagement and school drop-out suggests that many students, especially those attending large, urban schools, face teachers who are apathetic and who seem distant or cold with students (Fine, 1991; see also Valenzuela, 1999). The exchanges noted here suggest continuations of previous shared conversations and interests (such as the exchange with Mr. Brown about basketball teams) and patterns of relationships that students have come to expect from teachers (such as the banter between a student and Mr. Perse). Such causal exchanges have been noted to strengthen students’ ability to cope with difficulty (Gilligan, 2000; Johnson, 2008).

### *Taking Interest in Students' Lives*

Along with casual, friendly relationships, teachers' interest in learning more about their students supports academic resilience. In taking interest in students' lives beyond the classroom, teachers are able to see students as individuals and tap into their worldviews, understandings, and knowledge. For instance, Mr. McDaniel explained why he asks students questions about themselves.

Sometimes you just ask, "Do you have any brothers or sisters?" Just a simple little question [so] that you can talk about something besides mathematics with them. And you just take that little thing and sometimes they'll open up and you'll find out all about their life. Other times you'll just find out that they have two brothers. (Mr. McDaniel)

Mr. McDaniel noted the sense of wanting to relate to students beyond the perfunctory roles of teacher and student. His questions seem to have no ulterior motive; instead, the questions he asks seem to convey a sense of interest in those he teaches. This sense of relatedness is important because it can provide motivation for student learning (see Reeve, 2006). In addition, teachers saw a link between connecting with students and their learning.

And I also believe strongly that teachers in any situation that [they are in the position] to learn just as much as the student, in the younger. And when you approach relationships in that way, there's a respect that's given and a connection that's made that's different than you could have. Not just here to be friends but that, "I know physics but I have also things to gain from you." So that makes a very different relationship and connection. (Ms. Ross)

Here Ms. Ross discusses the value of making a connection with students as integral to reciprocal teaching and learning. Her description suggests that it is students' broad knowledge, beyond what is picked up in school, that counts. She seems to prioritize students' "funds of knowledge" (Moll & Gonzalez, 2004), that is, the expertise that students bring to school deriving from their experiences, family, cultural traditions, youth culture, and media. Central to this idea is that students learn new knowledge best when instructional activities take into account what they already know (McIntyre, Rosebery, & González, 2001). This concept is very similar to Ladson-Billings' (1994) "culturally relevant pedagogy" in which students' lives and



experiences are taken into account in order to teach students. When students' expertise and lives are considered, new meaning and connections are made with the curriculum, which positively influences learning, especially for minority youth (Brice Heath, 1983; Delgado-Gaitan & Trueba, 1991; Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2009). Overall, teachers' interest in their students, as individuals, seems to emphasize that "all students—not just those who conform to the dominant cultural norms—have experiences, knowledge, and skills that can be used as resources to help them learn even more" (Villegas & Lucas, 2002, p. 36).

### *Coping With Secondary Stressors*

Teachers use trusting relationships to encourage and support students to cope with difficult situations and to remain engaged and committed to their progress. Some of the issues that students at Alamosa confront are similar to what Alva (1991) and others have called "secondary stressors." These are challenges that students from nondominant groups face, such as discrimination, which make students vulnerable and exacerbate the consequences of inequitable schooling conditions (see Gutiérrez, 2008). For Alamosa students, these challenges include stereotyping, racism, and immigration—issues prevalent in their urban Latino community

Teachers discussed the need to confront the stereotypes that students might "buy into." For example, Ms. Ross described how she tries to change the views of some students that "This is just Alamosa," a characterization that suggests a view that the school, and the education obtained within it, is substandard because it serves a majority of Latino students in an impoverished community. Ms. Ross spoke of the difficulty in instilling a sense of being capable when students' comments suggest that they have embraced stereotypes of the school and its students. She reported how, even before they start high school, students have already bought into the idea of limited achievement:

My students will often come in with already a sense of we're not as good; we're not at Lamar Academy [a magnet school known for its programs for gifted students], we're at Alamosa. Because that means something—who they think they are is actually affected; who they know they are is actually influenced by what society says to them. You know that's ingrained; it's not something to easily overcome. . . . As students become more comfortable with me, they're more willing to even make other comments and say things that have given me more

insight into that. I hear from time to time, “Well yeah, they did great at the science fair; they’re all white,” like that means something about their ability to actually do well at the science fair. (Ms. Ross)

Ms. Smith raised the challenge of racism as she discussed an incident while on a field trip.

We were on a field trip and we were on [public transportation] and the driver made some derogatory comment and I’m very confrontational when it comes to race issues and I have a hard time biting my tongue, but I had students . . . and that was the hardest time cause a lot of my students wanted to speak up and I told them they couldn’t and I wrote a letter to [the transit authority]. As a chaperone, having to deal with that and then having to calm down some kids that are angry and hurt by it. It’s very hard cause they’re kids and you shouldn’t say that to kids, you shouldn’t say crap like that to anyone. But to high school kids? (Ms. Smith)

Ms. Ellis explained how she came about considering putting a teacher committee that would focus on helping bilingual students. In her interview, she explained her strategy for combating students’ negative feelings about being undocumented:

So the kid comes to us or they don’t, they don’t come to you with that problem [being undocumented] because they’re ashamed, which is really horrible. I try to tell them, “You know what, that has nothing to do with who you are. That is someone’s rule from up above.” And that’s the message that I really try to get across. “Your legal status has nothing to do with what you deserve in life and who you are. And unfortunately it’s a big factor and it affects you but you can’t let it get under your skin and affect your self-esteem.” (Ms. Ellis)

The quotes by the three teachers highlight their ability to notice and attend to the ways that minority students are sometimes made to feel, treated, or their fears and worries related to their circumstance. Understanding students’ experiences prevents a sole focus on the technical aspects of schooling, making it harder to look for deficit-based explanations when there is a lack of academic success (Valenzuela, 1999). Furthermore, an understanding of the inequitable economic, social, and political forces that work against students is necessary in order to support students in ways that help them cope with

obstacles in and outside of school (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2009, Kozol, 1992). Teachers' abilities to recognize the pressures and challenges their students face suggest they are committed to changing students' learning environments to facilitate success (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Attention to a classroom environment that focuses on the individual needs of students is more often created by teachers with strong self-efficacy (Ashton et al., 1982).

In the classrooms, what was observed were teachers who, through their practices, seemed to relay positive messages about the school, community, and students. For example, in the art lesson observed, Mr. Fitz mentioned that a local TV station visited Alamosa earlier that day and that "for once, they were not here looking for dirt on us." Kids seemed to understand that Mr. Fitz's comment alluded to the negative publicity and perceptions about Alamosa. One girl loudly expressed exaggerated astonishment, "Whoa, whoa." Mr. Fitz also provided directions and instructions throughout his lesson both in English and Spanish, indicating an awareness and respect for his students who are English learners.

In Ms. Ellis's class for English language learners (ESL), she was observed asking her students what word in Spanish sounded like the word "destiny." The students responded with the cognate "destino." Because her class was also comprised of non-Spanish speakers, she quickly asked one of her two Chinese students, "What is the word for 'destiny' in your language?" Ms. Ellis, repeating the word a couple of times, claimed, "I'm sure I'm not pronouncing it the right way." In several classrooms, including Mr. Brown's, Mr. Perse's, and Ms. Peterson's, students were observed helping each other and carrying on conversations in Spanish. Students' comfort in using Spanish in these classrooms seem to indicate teachers' view of students' language as a resource and skill that helps them in learning (see Delgado-Gaitan & Trueba, 1991; Villegas & Lucas, 2002).

Much work suggests that teachers' understanding of student realities and sociocultural identities supports a closer relationship between teacher and students (Delpit, 1992; Foster, 1993; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Patterson et al., 2008; Valenzuela, 1999; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). In turn, these relations help to reduce stressors particular to the experiences of marginalized students. Strong relationships with students seem to be intertwined with the space and support for continued school engagement made highly visible through teachers' high academic expectations and support. To this we turn to next.

## **High Academic Expectations and Support**

Teachers provided students with opportunities to succeed on assignments without watering down the lessons. As Ms. Ross noted, she tries to provide work that is "easy enough that any student can succeed" yet contains

elements “that are challenging enough [so] that it’s not boring and stupid.” Ms. Peterson offered her perspective on the relationship between expectations and outcomes:

I always think that you just act like they can, and I have worked at different places and I think kids are kids and I know that they have difficulties and I know there’s holdbacks, but they’re capable and they’re smart and they can do it. If you just have that expectation of them, and yes, maybe you have to model and scaffold lessons differently so that they can understand it and get to where you need them to be. (Ms. Peterson)

The sentiment that Ms. Peterson expresses is revealing in two ways. First, the statement points out how learning outcomes are connected to high standards. Second, it emphasizes how, along with high expectations, teachers must provide the support necessary to meet those high goals. Also inherent in Ms. Peterson’s statement is the belief that she can successfully model and scaffold lessons so that students can experience academic success in her class.

We can infer teachers’ beliefs in their capacity from their descriptions of what they deem necessary to maintain high standards in their classrooms while providing the support needed for students to be successful. Such support includes modeling and individualized assistance, “breaking down” the content and “taking smaller steps to get to the bigger picture.” Mr. Perse noted that when the content is broken down for students and “when they see it in smaller parts, sometimes they do better.” Teachers stated that they employed these approaches based on their previous success. Such mastery experiences, or previous successes, are believed to be major influences in raising one’s sense of efficacy (Bandura, 1993).

### *Encouraging Student Engagement*

Encouragement is another way that teachers strengthen student engagement. Statements such as “I know from your answer that you can do this” and using students’ own previous writing work as an example and stating, “Look, you can write this,” are ways by which teachers encourage students to persist. Part of helping students persist entails changing students’ beliefs of what they are capable of accomplishing. For example, Ms. Ross believes that many students, especially girls, see science as daunting. Ms. Ross explained the importance of assuring her female students of their ability to understand the subject: “And I want them to realize that they’re not only as good as the boys at science; but [that] they have their own unique, wonderful ability to

succeed in ways over and beyond anybody.” Student engagement also involves helping students gain perspective on their current circumstances and keep them focused on their academic goals. Teachers felt that they accomplish this through the use of encouraging words, such as, “I know this thing is really difficult right now, but it’s not always going to be and you do still have other things that you need to do” (Ms. Lowell).

In the classrooms, teachers were often heard complimenting student participation and responding positively to students. General encouraging and positive comments like “good job” and “great work today, class” were fairly commonplace. Others, like Ms. Lowell, read aloud the names of individual students who had recently improved their grades. Perhaps more important, students were encouraged through comments and questions aimed at deepening their thinking and individual ways of tackling problems.

Mr. Brown: “What type of equipment do the Vietnamese have for fighting?” [Pointing to the paused video documentary showing weapons the Vietnamese used during the Vietnam War]

Saul: “garbage.”

[Students laugh]

Mr. Brown: “Saul, what do you mean by garbage?”

Saul: “Not good, outdated.”

Mr. Brown agrees and continues with the lesson.

As this segment from a history lesson revealed, Mr. Brown validated Saul’s initial description he used to describe the weapons. By having Saul reformulate his answer, he ensured that Saul’s contribution was not dismissed based on the term he chose in answering the question (the use of the term “garbage”). In this way, Saul was encouraged to provide a more concrete description of the types of weapons shown in the documentary and in turn was supported to achieving the expectations of the class.

Another example of encouragement is from Mr. McDaniel’s class, where students were figuring solutions to mathematical problems. As he went through the steps to solving a problem, Mr. McDaniel reminded students that there were two possible ways to solve it. One student asked, “Which is the best way?” To which Mr. McDaniel replied, “Whichever you are most comfortable with.” Here, Mr. McDaniel not only acknowledged that mathematical problems can have multiple ways or paths to being solved but also encouraged students to figure what method best suits them. This form of encouragement alludes to Mr. McDaniel’s belief that students are capable of

determining which way of solving mathematical problems is best for them and may indicate to students that the procedures to math are not necessarily prescribed or found in the teacher (see Lee, 2007).

### *Acknowledging Student Effort*

Because these teachers believe that progress is not linear or free from setbacks, they pay close attention to students' progress patterns. Such understanding of students' achievement is used to encourage students. In particular, teachers discussed the importance of noting when a student is trying to improve or if "they pull themselves up for certain things." Ms. Peterson echoed the importance of pointing out changes in student class work:

I also try, like if they do something that they're not normally completing, or they do a good job at something, it's kind of you really play it up sometimes to inspire confidence cause I think a lot of times they don't have confidence and so if they get a little bit of confidence, they're willing to go a little bit further, do more and maybe test themselves a little bit more. (Ms. Peterson)

Mr. McDaniel similarly pointed out the importance of recognizing students' attempts to reengage in school:

And I think as a teacher, when I'm up there teaching, I try to be aware of every single one of my students. And I try and notice when they have that little "blip," when all of a sudden they handed in their homework two days in a row when they hadn't handed one in three months; they passed their test or quiz. . . . I noticed they're taking a little better notes. I try to notice from each one and when I notice them the first thing I like to do is go up there and just one on one say, "You know, that's good. You passed a couple of quizzes; I know you can pass my class, if you pay attention, exactly how you've done this thing." Or, "You know, you handed in homework, good job." (Mr. McDaniel)

The statements by Ms. Peterson and Mr. McDaniel illustrate how academic engagement and achievement is viewed as neither static nor fixed, but instead as fluctuating because it is contextually sensitive (Luthar, 2006). When school performance is viewed this way, classroom lessons, homework, and assignments become about providing students with chances. Teachers' own sense of efficacy may drive them to continue trying to help

students obtain some form of achievement because high efficacy tends to drive continuous effort even in the face of sure failure (Bandura, 1993). Teachers' acknowledgment of individual efforts also strengthens students' sense of self (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Helping students to experience success in the classroom and to recognize such success, even if seemingly small or temporary, is an important aspect of promoting student resilience.

### *Teacher Flexibility and Availability*

Because the support that teachers provide is specific to the context and needs of individual students, teachers discussed specific instances of efforts to address the needs of students who may not be experiencing even temporary success. In particular, they stressed that part of teacher support lies in the ability to be flexible regarding students' work, especially when students are turning in little or no class work or homework. Flexibility in student work included allowing students to make up incomplete assignments, retake tests, and extra credit. Such adaptability not only takes into account the possibility that students may begin trying but also acknowledges student diversity and individual differences. For example, teachers spoke of allowing students to process what they learned through other means such as through drawings and extending the topics of projects based on the interests of students. Ms. Ellis's comment suggests that she understands that providing students with options for the format and style of presentations is important for her student population.

I have a student who does not want to do oral presentations and that's a very common thing with language learners. So I will give them an option: instead of doing it in front of the whole class, come after school and do it in front of a small group. Trying to find ways to meet their needs but still have expectations of them, still challenge them, not just saying, "Oh poor you; you don't have to do this." (Ms. Ellis)

Through the classroom observations, other ways that teachers' actions suggested versatility were documented. For example, on one occasion, as Ms. Smith was handing out progress reports, one of her students asked why her grade was so low. The teacher looked at her report and said, "Cause you have not done the egg drop" (students were learning about momentum); then casually added, "Just come after school, do the lab work, and I'll remove that F." In another class, Ms. Peterson, while discussing a vocabulary quiz, explained to her students that she had noticed that they were struggling with

the assigned vocabulary. She went over the vocabulary, gave examples on how to use the specific vocabulary words, and let them know that they could ask her whether they were using the word correctly in a sentence. She went on to explain that she would allow those students who wanted to retake the quiz to do so on Friday and that she would give extra time to those who needed it.

As we have stated earlier, being flexible does not mean that teachers let go of their expectations regarding assignments and homework. For example, during the observation, Mr. Perse was observed walking around the room collecting the homework from the night before. When he came to a student who reported that she had not had time to do the homework, Mr. Perse remarked, "You had all night. I want it in my mailbox by the end of the day."

By providing options for class work, chances to make up assignments, and different ways for students to show their ability, teachers may be indicating to students that they have high expectations and are willing to work with them. But more important, teachers' actions and beliefs about learning may indicate to students that the teacher is not willing to give up on them. That is, even when faced with almost certain failure, a teachers' willingness to be adaptable and to recognize student effort can be counted on. This continuous emphasis on learning outcomes reinforces teachers' ultimate purpose—to educate students through the establishment of high academic expectations (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Levin, 1987). And just as teachers believe that high expectations need to be complemented with teacher support, they also believe that flexibility and teacher availability go hand in hand.

Teachers indicate that they are willing to spend much of their free time helping students because they believe this is part of what strengthens students' ability to keep trying. All the 10 teachers viewed their responsibility to students as extending beyond the school day and beyond school issues. Each of the respondents spoke of situations in which they took the time to provide advice on private matters or just to show social and emotional support—practices believed to have a positive influence on Latino youth (Stanton-Salazar & Spina, 2003).

Teachers' discussions, and instances observed in the classroom, suggest that support was not confined to a class period or school day. Teachers' time went to supporting students' educational, informational, as well as emotional needs. This was evident in that all teachers had after-school hours to meet with students and all sponsored or were part of after-school organizations, including sports teams, student council, and dance troops (see Table 1). Providing students with the time and support they need may very well strengthen students' commitment to persevere despite setbacks.



## School Context

As noted in the review of the literature section, the context in which efficacy beliefs operate is important. The teachers in this study discussed facing limitations and constraints in helping their students. Two limitations in particular were raised: lack of teacher support by administration and lack of a whole-school attempt to foster student success.

### *Lack of Administrative Support*

This group of teachers were unable to describe instances where they received proper training or incentives for responding to students' needs. As Ms. Lara quipped, "There's not been support or training; or if someone said something in a professional development time, then I guess I missed it 'cause nothing helpful has come out of that." Instead, teachers spoke of receiving informal training by "observing good coworkers" and receiving support from colleagues in their department and from other departments.

Teachers described constraints similar to the systemic constraints that Valenzuela (1999) and others (Stanton-Salazar & Spina, 2003) have described in their studies on school support of Mexican American student achievement. These constraints include lack of access to material resources, lack of incentives for prioritizing students' overall well-being, and scheduling of classes, which leaves little or no chance for connecting with students. Mr. Perse spoke of constraints in the following manner: "Have they supported me or other teachers with a stipend for staying after school? No. Have the administrators gone above and beyond to help the students? I don't think so."

Half of the participants spoke of limited support from administration in helping them improve ways in which to promote resilience. Interestingly, they all agreed that there was room for improvement and that school systems can always do better. Teachers who felt supported spoke of the availability of administration if they needed help. Help by administration included having access to student files, school deans being "open" to teachers obtaining information regarding students, and their willingness to look into individual students' circumstances. In other words, teachers felt assisted because of their access to Deans and student information. In each case, the teacher sought out the needed information. Teachers, in turn, were able to use the information and access provided by administration as guidance on how best to proceed in terms of helping the student in need.

### *Lack of Whole-School Attempt to Foster Student Success*

Work related to academic achievement and school environment shows that schools as a whole need to establish high academic standards in order to improve student outcomes (Delpit, 1992; Ladson-Billings, 1994). Five of the teachers in this study alluded to how the school, as a whole, did not have such expectations for students. For example, Ms. Smith related her frustration about how some of the curriculum in her content area was curtailed.

I get into fights all the time with the department chair. They're like, you shouldn't teach this or that 'cause they're not going to need it in life. And some of it is the basics of chemistry. And I teach it anyway, 'cause I don't see them as, "Oh, they may not need it in life," I see them as they need it now for this class. . . . So I do what I'm told to do and then teach what I'm told to teach but then I try to teach it when I know they're not going to be here. I just think that students should learn what they're expected to learn and not some watered-down stuff, so I actually step it up. I don't like being told they're not supposed to learn something. (Ms. Smith)

Teachers were willing to take on advocacy roles when they felt that prescribed teachings were ineffective, a waste of students' time, or in some instances, harmful. Teachers, Ms. Smith included, described how they tried to circumvent prescribed requirements when they felt those were not beneficial to student learning. As Ms. Ellis explained, "I take what the administration tells me to do, and I won't say that I take it with a grain of salt, but I do it to the extent that it's useful for my students."

Half of the participants lamented how some teachers within their school expressed no interest in students' lives or how they were unwilling to put the time and effort into helping students. Although teachers in this study understood that no single teacher could reach every student, they believed that if more teachers took an interest, more students could be reached. As Ms. Smith explained, "So there's students you're not going to reach but you got to give them to somebody who might be able to reach them 'cause I think, out of seven teachers, the student has to connect with at least one of them—hopefully, that's my hope." Ms. Ellis also underscored the influence of caring teachers: "When they [students] know you have expectations and that you care, they respond. And they are very sharp on picking it up when a teacher doesn't care and they shut down, a lot of them."

In sum, teachers discussed hindrances in helping students. Whereas a school context that lacks whole student support has been shown to make teachers feel powerless in helping them (Stanton-Salazar & Spina, 2003) and social and systematic constraints may erode teachers' continued support, this was not the case for these teachers. Although they expressed their frustrations with the administration's limited support and with other teachers and staff who they viewed as unsupportive of students, their focus seemed to be on continuously trying to find ways to connect with students and strengthen their academic engagement.

## Conclusion

The findings of this work indicate that teachers' sense of efficacy, around resilience, is linked to the ways they promote this process, supporting the belief that behavior is strongly predicted by perceived self-efficacy (e.g., Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk-Hoy, & Hoy, 1998; Woolfolk & Hoy, 1990). Unique to this work and population of students, the findings of this work revealed strategies that are specific to strengthening the resilience of Latino students, for example, teachers' acceptance and view of students' use of Spanish as an asset in their learning. Similarly, teachers' themselves, in some cases, switched between English and Spanish (e.g., Mr. Fitz and Ms. Ellis) as a way to make adjustments for English language learners and as a way to make all students feel as part of the classroom community. Another finding unique to this work is the sensitivity that teachers displayed around the added stressors that Latino students face. For example, teachers were aware of and tried to speak to the worries that students had around immigrant status. They also tried to help students move beyond accepting certain stereotypes that surround them and their school.

Another important finding is that despite the sense of a lack of administrative support and lack of caring by other teachers, teacher interactions and pedagogic strategies indicate that they viewed the lack of whole-school emphasis on student support as a reason to keep trying harder. This is important because, although the literature has shown that schools with school-wide student support have better performance outcomes (Ross & Gray, 2006), there is less information on how teachers, such as the ones discussed here, tend to form "pockets" of success and support. It is telling, in fact, that teachers often spoke of students who continuously sought them out, months, or several years, after they had taught the student (Sosa, 2008).

## Recommendations

Teachers' connections with and academic expectations of students seem not only conducive to learning but also to students' own understanding of their capabilities and potential for success. This is of particular importance to Latino students attending urban schools, where often the message received focuses on the lack of achievement and success linked to a generalized perception of deficit within the students themselves (Delpit, 1992; Gonzalez, 2005) and their assumed impediments, including language and cultural practices (Valenzuela, 1999). By making explicit the connection between teachers' sense of efficacy and their behaviors and perceptions of students, the focus of teacher preparation programs can then be shifted to finding ways to address beliefs and assumptions about certain students and schools. In addition, by prioritizing students' full human growth (Noddings, 1992; Valenzuela, 1999), teacher support and teacher-student relationships that attend to the social, emotional, and educational needs of students (Hargreaves, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Valenzuela, 1999) are positioned at the heart of school and preparation programs.

*School leaders.* There is strong evidence that school leadership is linked to teacher outcomes and that schools that have a collective sense of student expectations have higher student academic achievement (Ross & Gray, 2006). Building a collective sense of the school is, in part, achieved by school leaders setting feasible goals, providing constant feedback, and promoting academic emphasis in the school (Hoy & Woolfolk, 1993). Toward this goal, administrators need to find ways to support teacher commitment and begin building the type of professional community shown to influence positive school change (see Bryk & Schneider, 2002). Also, school leaders should support collaboration efforts among teachers and develop coaching relationships and peer connections among teachers (Blasé & Blasé, 2000). Furthermore, school leaders need to provide teachers with access to professional development that focuses on building pedagogical skills that align with support of student expectations.

Finally, school leaders need to recognize the challenges that their particular student population face and put into place advocacy strategies (as well as support teachers in advocacy roles) necessary to lessen structural barriers that impede student success. In this way, teacher support is developed and a space is provided such that teachers, with high self-efficacy, serve as role models to guide their colleagues in developing beneficial relationships and expectations for all students. As Buchman (quoted in Payne, 1994) points out, "When teachers are left alone without support, they may lower their goals, withdraw,

or discount some groups as unteachable” (p. 193). In helping teachers to teach and support urban students, training is imperative. According to Stanton-Salazar and Spina (2003), teachers in urban settings must be provided with training to have “a critical understanding of, and appropriate ways of, responding to the accumulated distress of students. . . .” (p. 251).

### *Study Limitations and Final Thoughts*

This study sheds some light on the link between teacher efficacy beliefs and practices that promote student resilience; however, some limitations need to be considered. The caution and insistence by Pajares (1992) and Bandura (1993) that efficacy beliefs’ strengths vary, according to the levels within any domain, and thus need to be individually assessed in order to collectively determine the efficacy of that domain, were not fully given attention. For this work, this means that teachers’ sense of efficacy needed to be more specifically assessed by exploring teachers’ strength in their beliefs regarding their ability to help students sustain academic engagement when dealing with specific obstacles such as everyday school issues or hassles (Jindal-Snape & Miller, 2008; Johnson, 2008; Newman, 2002), discrimination and racism (Alva, 1991; Holleran & Waller, 2003), or acute life events (Lynskey & Fergusson, 1997; Rew, Taylor-Seehafer, Thomas, & Yockey, 2001). Some teachers, for example, may feel more capable of helping students deal with everyday school issues than helping them cope with issues of racism. Also, because the actual outcomes of students in the 10 teachers’ classrooms were not examined, we cannot link teachers’ efficacy beliefs to students’ own sense of resilience. However, these limitations do not detract from the significance of identifying ways in which Latino students’ academic engagement and resilience are supported.

To summarize, this work suggests that teachers with a strong sense of efficacy, specifically in their ability to strengthen student resilience, build powerful relationships with students and support them to achieve the high academic expectations they set out even when the school context is not fully supportive of this endeavor. These relationships and support, in turn, help students to remain academically engaged despite social, institutional, and personal setbacks. We hope that this work spurs further discussion and research about specific self-efficacy beliefs, teaching practice, and the academic resilience, engagement, and outcomes of Latino students.

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## Note

1. Sosa and Gomez (2011) describe the interview protocol in detail, and the discussion will not be reprised in full here.

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