

The role of identity based and cultural organizations in the persistence of Latinx aspiring teachers

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Background

- Latinx teachers remain underrepresented in the U.S. workforce—only 9% of teachers identify as Latinx, despite Latinx students making up 28% of K-12 enrollment.¹
- Systemic barriers such as discrimination, cultural mismatch, and limited support create a “leaking pipeline” for Latinx teacher candidates.^{2,3}
- Identity-based and cultural organizations, like Nuestra Ciencia and Educators of Color at Cal Poly, have the potential to affirm students’ identity and belonging and promote persistence of Latinx aspiring teachers.^{4,5}
- Understanding these supports is key to diversifying the teacher workforce and improving educational outcomes for Latinx students.

Research Questions

What is the experience of Latinx/e students pursuing a career in education at Cal Poly?

- What challenges did Latinx/e students pursuing a career in education face at Cal Poly?
- How do Cal Poly programs/organizations support Latinx/e students pursuing a career in education?

Method

Participants: Five Cal Poly alumni who participated in Nuestra Ciencia, a bilingual science education program

Table 1: Participant Demographics

Participant Pseudonym	College Major	Gender	Post Graduation
Fernando	Psychology	Male	Graduate student in psychology
Javier	Liberal Studies	Male	Bilingual middle school teacher
Alice	Environmental Management and Protection	Female	Bilingual educator at environmental program
Annie	Liberal Studies	Female	Bilingual student-teacher
Sam	Liberal Studies	Female	Bilingual student-teacher

Data Collection: Demographic survey and interviews with alumni conducted over Zoom by postdoc and undergraduate researchers

Data Analysis: Systematic coding in MAXQDA to find themes related to teaching, and supports and challenges at Cal Poly⁶

Conceptual Framework

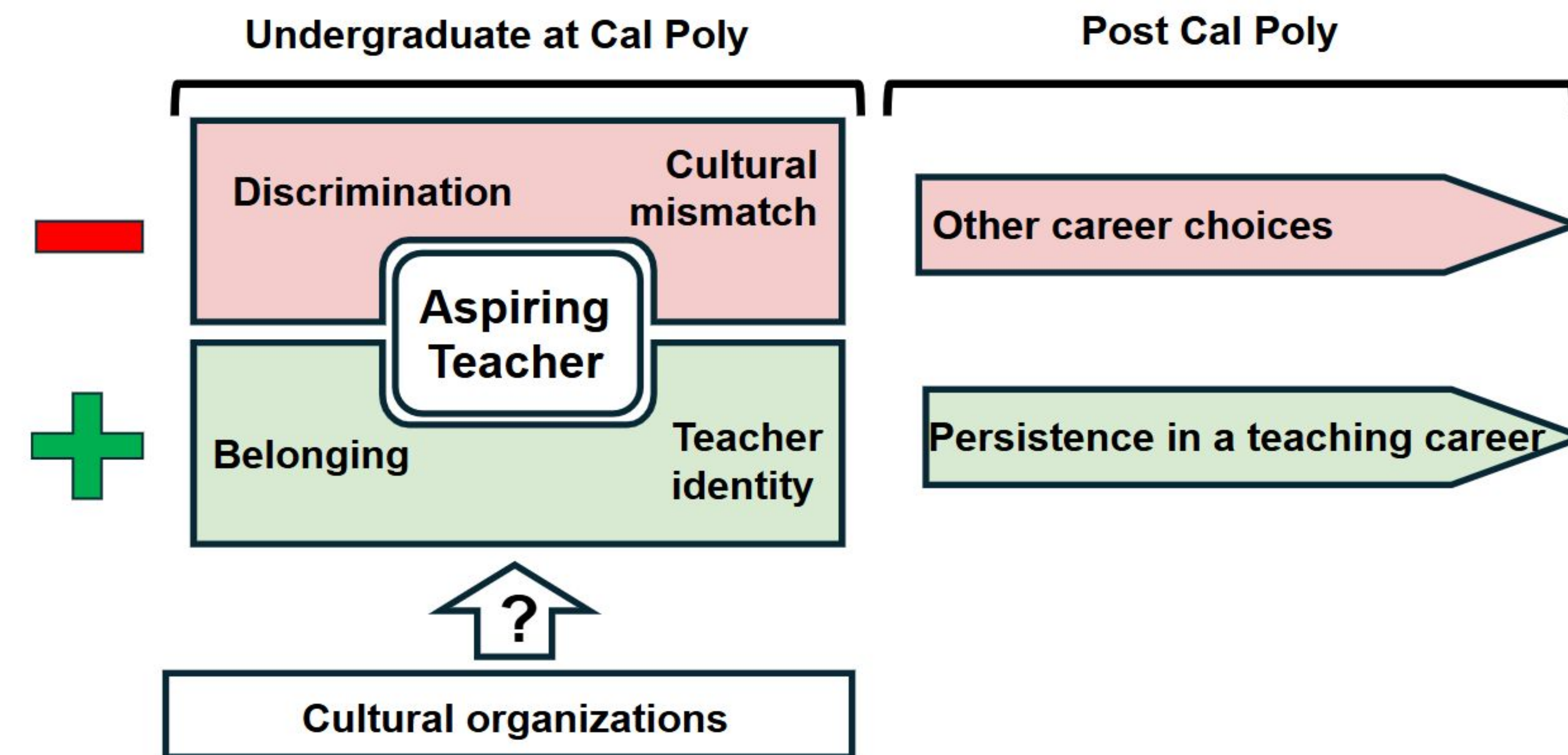


Figure 1: Trajectory of Latinx Aspiring Teachers from their Undergraduate Education at Cal Poly to their Post-Graduation Career Paths. The negative sign represents challenges that aspiring teachers may face during their undergraduate education that may detract them from persisting towards a teaching career, like discrimination and a cultural mismatch. The positive sign represents promotive factors that may help aspiring teachers persist in their path towards becoming a teacher, like belonging and teacher identity. In our project, we explore the potential of cultural organizations to provide opportunities for students to develop their belonging and teacher identity at Cal Poly.

Preliminary Findings

“The only reason why I felt like I belonged there was because we all kind of had the same end goal of being teachers. **But were it a random class, I feel like I would not have belonged** just because that’s how I felt in some of my math classes for the math classes where **I was the only Hispanic student I just felt like I didn’t have anybody with me to talk or to reach out to.**”

“I don’t feel like I belonged there because of what I just shared, but I think Nuestra Ciencia really helped me like sort of bridge that gap and feeling like I’ve been, I was **part of something and I belong to something** and it was in Spanish, which was a plus so it helped me feel more comfortable at Cal Poly”

“So really up until I left for Cal Poly, my interactions had mostly been in Spanish. So there’s a there’s a difference. Socializing in English and in Spanish, and I didn’t really know how to socialize in English so it was a bit more **awkward for me to try to like, make friends and socialize when I got to Cal Poly** just because I had done it my whole life, but in Spanish. And so that was more of a **culture shock.**”

“I found the community. It gave me, also like academic, it rewarded me academically, professionally. It **opened the doors for other opportunities within Cal Poly and a lot of recognition as well for being part of that group.** And so that that was, I think the the major thing that it added to my time at Cal Poly and it just really overall became sort of **my part of my identity, you know like part of everything that I did was like, oh, it’s because I met a lot of people through Nuestra Ciencia. And I gained a lot of things through Nuestra Ciencia.**”

Discussion

Summary of Preliminary Findings:

- Latinx aspiring educators at Cal Poly experienced cultural shock, social isolation, and imposter syndrome that compromised their sense of belonging to the university and their major
- Participating in Nuestra Ciencia provided students with a sense of community, confidence in their teaching skills, and pride in their culture (e.g., speaking Spanish) that promoted their sense of belonging and identity development

Implications:

- Address a critical issue in the education field of recruiting and retaining Latinx teachers into the workforce as they face challenges to their persistence⁷
- Support the development of spaces at higher education institutions that empower Latinx aspiring teachers to thrive
- Especially important to address at Cal Poly as an emerging Hispanic-serving institution that strives to foster the sense of belonging and academic retention of Latinx students⁸

Future Directions:

- Continue collecting and analyzing data from Nuestra Ciencia alumni to get a better sense of how their experience in the program shaped their teaching aspirations
- Expand data collection to obtain insight from Cal Poly Latinx undergraduate alumni who participated in other student organizations, like Educators of Color and Latinos in Agriculture
- Identify best practices across student organizations for supporting Latinx undergraduate students to persist in their teaching aspirations

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