

The Latino Education Crisis: The Consequences of Failed Social Policies (2010).

Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

By Patricia Gándara and Frances Contreras

Eden Cortez

University of Utah

In *The Latino Education Crisis* by Gándara and Contreras (2010), the authors offer an in-depth analysis of the American public school system that has historically failed to provide adequate and equitable education opportunities for the Latino population in the U.S. In their book, they argue that the inadequate education of Latinos creates a barrier for social and economic mobility and if we fail to address the “low education achievement of Latino youth... we will have created a permanent underclass without hope of integrating into the mainstream or realizing their potential to contribute to American society” (p. 13-14). Gándara and Contreras utilize national data on K-12 Latino education achievements, longitudinal studies, and students’ narratives to demonstrate the severity of having an undereducated emerging minority. They address the education crisis by focusing on educational, socioeconomic, political, and immigration policies. This book provides ample information on the current state of Latinos in every sector of the education system as well as utilizes the students’ narrative to demonstrate the type of living conditions that can promote or hinder education achievement.

Gándara and Contreras begin with an introduction chapter that provides their readers with background information on the current state of Latinos, especially “individuals of Mexican origin” (p. 7) or descent, in the U.S. This chapter allows readers to understand the complex education crisis that Mexican decent youth have and continue to endure in their educational trajectory. Immigration is a central topic in this chapter and Gándara and Contreras explain the relationship of immigration and education achievement by sharing studies that contradict the relation of low education achievement to immigration background. They conclude that immigrant students outperform their Latino native-born peers in the subject of English. Therefore, immigration cannot be the sole contributor of the low education achievement of Latino students. Gándara and Contreras explain that it is the current living conditions of Latinos in this society that impacts their education attainment.

In chapters one and two, Gándara and Contreras place into context the achievement gaps of Latinos students from kindergarten through high school by using multiple assessment data that constantly place Latinos at the low performing end. They also provide an in-depth discussion on educational landmark cases (*Plyer v. Doe* and *Lau v. Nichols*), affirmative action, standardize testing policies, and social conditions that contribute to the marginalization of Latinos in education and society. Further, the story of Carlos and Andrés, two of the many Latino students whose stories are present in this book, are brought forward to provide a social context of the lives of Latinos in the U.S. Gándara and Contreras seamlessly integrate Carlos and Andrés’ social and educational background into their book to shed light on the social conditions that impact, negatively or positively, the education attainment of high school and college Latino students. The stories of these two students, and others, help the readers understand that whether students have advantages or disadvantages (e.g., parent education background, socioeconomic status, and student education background) do not determine their success or failure in school. It is the “social context in which the students” (p. 55) grow up that can shape “their vision of the future” (p.55), and not having the necessary resources in their communities can impact their level of education achievement.

In chapter three, Gándara and Contreras make an argument that public schools are a critical component for “further occupational opportunities, but also key to” socializing Latinos “into American society” (p. 86) but many fail to provide such an opportunity for their students. The data provided by Gándara and Contreras illustrates the inadequate school facilities and poor educational instructions of public schools in predominantly low-income Latino neighborhoods. Gándara and Contreras end the chapter by emphasizing, “given the enormous barriers that Latino children face, is not evidence of a lack of intellectual ability,” (p. 120) a clear proof that our education system lacks support systems needed to facilitate a successful education.

Furthermore, chapter four is dedicated to answer the beliefs that language deficits cause low

education achievement in Latino students. Gándara and Contreras explore the perception that Latino children underperform in English due to their native language. By providing data from studies done on Latino students' language acquisition, Gándara and Contreras questions such perceptions and places the data into an education context. Proving that a significant number of Latino children are English speakers (contrary to beliefs that they all are native Spanish speakers) and that native Spanish speakers outperformer Latino English speakers, contradicts the issue of language being associated with low education achievement. Bilingual education as well as language assessment is at the core of the discussion in this chapter.

Chapter five and six are connected by a common theme, the experiences of college-going Latinos/as who become resilient. These two chapters provide the readers with an inside view of the lives of several Latino/a students, their hardships and successes, and the program that supported their transition from high school to college. The story of Carlos and Andrés and six other Latino/a participants of the Puente program are shared in this section. The eight students represent a small sample group followed during and after their participation in the Puente program and transition to college. The stories of each student demonstrate how regardless of high or low education performance in high school (e.g., GPA, SATs, AP and IB courses) students living conditions can either promote a college-going culture or subdue their aspirations to attend college. By sharing the students' stories and connecting their profile to national statistics on student achievement, Gándara and Contreras prove that even a high performing Latino/a student with all the characteristics that ensure that he/she will attend college can steer the opposite direction. There is no guarantee that a high GPA, SAT, and socioeconomic status can predict the overall success of Latino students. In fact, Gándara and Contreras highlight that Latinos who come from adverse backgrounds, and despite all odds, have manage to make it through K-12 and into college. Regardless of the success of these students, there are many how fall between the cracks of a failed public school system that is not serving its purpose, to educate those who have been historically marginalized, segregated, and oppressed.

In the last two chapters, Gándara and Contreras provide a wealth of information on intervention programs and they describe how to address, through seven initiatives, the several issues affecting Latino education. The programs presented in chapter range from early childhood to college. Each program promotes and encourages a healthy and high educational environment for Latino parents and their children. In chapter eight, Gándara and Contreras address the "seven areas in which public policy acknowledges the interlocking nature of schools and communities," (p. 307) therefore, changing the course "of academic achievement for Latino students" (p. 307). Gándara and Contreras recommendations are a small, but significant step to address the education crisis faced by many Latinos in the U.S.

Gándara and Contreras's book provide a complete analysis of the K-12 public school systems and the implications it has on Latinos attending post-secondary education. Their work is admirable as it counteracts deficit beliefs that place Latino students from every sector of the education system at fault for their overall low education achievement. This book is a great addition to the body of knowledge produced on Latino education. It is an essential book to read.

Reference

Gándara, P., & Contreras, F. (2009). *The Latino education crisis: The consequences of failed social policies*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.