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EL FUEGO NUEVO

CHARTING A NEW COURSE

Understanding the Sociocultural, Political, Economic, and
Historical Context of Latino/a Education in the United States

ASSOCIATION OF MEXICAN AMERICAN EDUCATORS
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EDITOR'S MESSAGE

The AMAE editors are especially grateful for and proud of this invited guest edited issue, led by senior editor Sonia Nieto and associate editors Melissa Rivera, Sandra Quiñones and Jason Irizarry, because it represents collaboration on multiple levels. First and foremost, AMAE has developed a working relationship with NLERAP (National Latino/a Education Research and Policy Project)—a national network and organization of experienced education researchers with an emphasis on Latino/a education. NLERAP's membership offers wonderful support and a door to many Latina/o researchers across the nation—a group with whom AMAE hopes to continue partnering. This invited issue is based on a set of regional meetings held by NLERAP to address the pressing issues facing Latinas/os in education. Deliberations revealed that what the group felt would be most useful is a critical review of the literature in the sociocultural, political, economic, and historical context of Latino/a education because it could serve as a foundation for the other areas of NLERAP's research agenda: Assessment and Accountability; Teacher Education and Professional Development; and Arts in Education.

NLERAP's goals of furthering their research benefits AMAE's readers because this invited issue represents a review of the most recent and cutting-edge work on Latinas/os in education. This compilation is a boon to all of us in schools, universities, think tanks, and community colleges—*es mucho mas que bueno, bonito y barato*. The folks at NLERAP, and the co-editors of this invited issue, have spent hundreds of hours distilling this information in a way that is accessible and revealing. To accomplish this, the issue is divided into three specific contexts: interpersonal, instructional, and institutional. The interpersonal context describes the significance of relationships among students, teachers, and families, and also details how using a “funds of knowledge” approach (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & González, 2005) can promote the educational achievement of Latinos/as. The instructional context reviews some of the approaches, both helpful and detrimental, that have been used with Latino/a students, and what can be learned from this history. In the section on the institutional context, concerns such as school climate, high-stakes testing, tracking, and the quality of teachers are addressed.

Another level of collaboration, of course, is represented by the co-editors and contributors themselves of each of the pieces in this invited issue, appropriately entitled, “Charting a New Course: Understanding the Sociocultural, Political, Economic, and Historical Context of Latino/a Education in the United States.” There are 13 contributors from eight different institutions who have worked together to bring these articles to our readership. We thank all of them for their time, dedication, scholarship and commitment to *la causa*. The excellent east coast editorial team put together an issue that will benefit all of us for years to come, and for that, we thank them *de todo corazón*.

Thanks,

Patricia Sánchez, AMAE Associate Editor
Oscar Jimenez-Castellanos, AMAE Co-Editor
Antonio Camacho, AMAE Co-Editor

Introduction

Sonia Nieto

University of Massachusetts—Amherst

Melissa Rivera

Hunter College - City University of New York

Sandra Quiñones

University of Rochester

Jason Irizarry

University of Connecticut

Latino/a students have been educated in U.S. schools for centuries, and still more will be arriving at our schools tomorrow. This reality is but one indication of the multiplicity of experiences that define the long, complex, and troubled history of Latinos/as in U.S. schools. Although they are more visible today than at any other time in our history, the fact remains that the sociocultural, political, economic, and historical context of Latino/a education is hardly known outside the university offices of academics who study it, or of teachers and administrators who teach Latino/a students. Given both the growing number of U.S.-born Latinos/as as well as the dramatically increasing number of newcomers, the need to confront the serious shortcomings of the education of Latinos/as has never been more urgent. In their comprehensive analysis of the education of Latinos/as in the U.S., Patricia Gándara and Frances Contreras (2009) put it bluntly: “Today,” they write, “the most urgent challenge for the American educational system has a Latino face” (p. 1).

Nevertheless, there is not just one Latino/a reality. The Latino community in the U.S. is incredibly diverse in terms of national origin, race, time in the U.S., political orientation, English and Spanish language ability and usage (among other home languages), and many other differences. Latinos/as in the U.S. include Mexican Americans, some of whom have been “here” before there was a “here,” that is, before the Southwest was annexed by the U.S. through the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo in 1848. Puerto Ricans began immigrating in large numbers in the late 1940s, although a Puerto Rican community existed in New York and Tampa as early as the 1860s, as did a small Cuban community. The large influx of Cubans began in the 1960s, and they were joined by large numbers of Dominicans, Salvadorans, and other Central and South Americans in the following decades. Thus, to claim that there is just one “Latino perspective” or “Latino experience” is to miss the multiplicity and complexity of our communities.

The work of addressing the challenge of the education of Latinos/as has begun through, among other efforts, the National Latino/a Education Research and Policy Project, or NLERAP. Beginning in 2000 as a national initiative of the Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños at Hunter College, NLERAP’s goal has been to add multiple Latino/a perspectives to the type of educational research needed to meet the needs of our communities throughout the U.S. After hosting a series of regional meetings around the country that invited educators, community activists, university scholars, and others within the broader Latino/a community to comment on the pressing educational needs of Latinos/as, the NLERAP National Advisory Board developed and published a research agenda (NLERAP, 2003). The Agenda articulated a framework for using participatory and collaborative research results to influence the outcomes of schooling for Latino/a youth. In addition to the Agenda document, the project also produced an academic volume (Pedraza & Rivera, 2005) with chapters written by leading scholars that substantiated the need for a community approach to the investigation of schooling issues for Latinos/as. In conjunction with the release of the volume, a press conference was held in Washington, D.C. to introduce the concerns it addressed (Viadero, 2005). From 2004 to 2009, NLERAP conducted its first local research project, with funding from the Ford Foundation, focused on the theme of arts in education at El Puente Academy for Peace and Justice in New York City (Rivera, Medellín-Paz, Pedraza et al., 2010).

Although the work of NLERAP has been important in making the issues of Latino/a education more

visible to the general public through national conferences, publications, and press releases, in 2007, the National Board met to discuss further actions that could promote the agenda even more vigorously. The Board decided that what was needed was a critical review of the literature in one of the four research areas suggested in the NLERAP Agenda document (2003). After a lengthy discussion, consensus emerged among board members that the *Sociocultural, Political, Economic, and Historical Context of Latino/a Education* was the most useful area to develop further because it could serve as a foundation for the others (Assessment and Accountability; Teacher Education and Professional Development; and Arts in Education).

This document is the result of those deliberations. In it, we address the context of education for Latino/as on the three levels enunciated in the Agenda documents (i.e., *interpersonal, instructional, and institutional*). We envision the review as a critical synthesis of the literature, intended for both professional and scholarly audiences. We expect that it will be used in teacher and administrative professional preparation courses as well as for developing proposals for research studies on the education of Latinos/as around the nation. The intent is not to define or limit *a priori* the parameters of any such research, but rather to provide a useful tool for researchers, practitioners, advocates, and administrators undertaking studies relating to the improvement of education for Latino/a students in their local areas. A major purpose is to contextualize the framework and approaches that have been used previously by others to analyze schooling problems found in different Latino/a communities around the country. Although we include all Latinos/as in this document, we are especially mindful of new immigrants, particularly those in geographic areas where Latino/a families had not traditionally settled until recently, most notably the Southeast and Northwest (Wortham, Murillo, & Hamann, 2002). Although most data are not disaggregated according to gender, we also want to caution readers that the current available information makes it quite clear that in most areas of schooling (academic achievement, high school graduation rates, college-going rates, and so forth), females outperform males even more so than in the general population. For example, Gary Orfield documented that in 2000, nearly 59 percent of Latinas graduated from high school compared with only 48 percent of Latinos/as (Orfield, Losen, Wald, & Swanson, 2004). This is a trend worth heeding as policymakers, administrators, and teachers think about potential programs and policies that will benefit male students. More recently, Patricia Gándara and Frances Contreras (2009) reviewed data that corroborated this trend, not only in terms of high school graduation rates but also in achievement in reading, math, and other content areas.

It is our hope that this review will help guide researchers and others willing to initiate efforts to address the complex problems faced by Latinos/as in school systems both in regions of the country in which they have traditionally settled as well as in regions that are not accustomed to their presence.

The document begins with a description of the NLERAP approach to research on the education of Latinos/as in the U.S. with a focus on sociocultural and sociopolitical contexts, and a description of Participatory Action Research, or PAR, an approach to pedagogy and research that shows great promise in both promoting achievement and encouraging civic engagement. This is followed by a brief general overview of the education of Latinos/as, including both historical and demographic data and an articulation of some of the foremost challenges concerning educational attainment among the various Latino/a communities. The majority of the review addresses three specific contexts: *interpersonal, instructional, and institutional*. The interpersonal context describes the significance of relationships among students, teachers, and families, and also details how using a *funds of knowledge* approach (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & González, 2005) can promote the educational achievement of Latinos/as. The instructional context reviews some of the approaches, both helpful and detrimental, that have been used with Latino/a students, and what can be learned from this history. In the institutional context section, issues such as school climate, high-stakes testing, tracking, and the quality of teachers are addressed. We need to emphasize that, although we separate the paper into three disparate sections, the sections are connected and overlapping. Moreover, each of these sections addresses political issues that affect the education of Latinos/as in myriad ways. For instance, issues of inequitable school financing, privatization, surveillance of undocumented families and raids on immigrants, teacher turnover, the high-stakes nature of testing, and English Only policies are particularly relevant in the institutional section, although they are also implicated in the instructional and interpersonal sections. Scholars, for example, have found that the teacher turnover rate in some schools in California is higher than 50 percent. Clearly, such turnover will have dramatic effects on

the lives and educational outcomes of young people, particularly for those relying on public schools as a site for growth, support, and stability.

Throughout all three sections, a number of vignettes and case studies, focusing mainly on immigrant and English language learners, will be used to illuminate the issues. The paper ends with a brief set of recommendations for charting a new course for the education of Latinos/as.

The NLERAP Approach

Sonia Nieto

University of Massachusetts—Amherst

Melissa Rivera

Hunter College City University of New York

Jason Irizarry

University of Connecticut

From the start, NLERAP has been based on two major premises: one is that a sociocultural and sociopolitical approach to learning is more effective than a traditional approach, particularly in the case of populations that have historically been marginalized through their education; and the second is that research is more meaningful and inclusive when it is defined through a participatory action research (PAR) approach. Each is described below.

A Sociocultural and Sociopolitical Approach to Teaching, Learning, and Research

Because there is no such thing as a “generic” student, the NLERAP approach to research honors students’ particular sociocultural realities. That is, students’ cultures, languages, and experiences should be taken into account in the design, development, and implementation of research studies. This means that linguistic variations (Spanish, English, bilingualism, bi-dialecticism, and youth language) all need to be acknowledged when conducting research on Latino/as. Furthermore, because Latinos/as reflect a tremendous diversity in terms of ethnic origin, history in the U.S., race, language use, social class, and other differences, NLERAP is based on the principle that research studies must recognize both commonalities and differences in these origins and experiences. Rather than assuming that these commonalities and differences are of little consequence, studies based on NLERAP’s principles recognize that sociocultural realities are an essential component of any research on Latino/as.

The NLERAP approach is also guided by a sociopolitical perspective. To view education within its sociopolitical context means to understand that education does not exist in a vacuum but instead is immersed in—and influenced by—particular political, economic, and social circumstances. This context includes both societal and school-based institutional structures, racism and other biases based on human and social differences (i.e., social class, language, sexual orientation, gender, and others), and the resultant traditions, laws, policies, and practices as well as school-based policies and practices such as ability tracking, high-stakes tests, curriculum and pedagogy, outreach to families, disciplinary policies. These policies and practices, in turn, reflect, albeit unwittingly, our society’s ideas and values about intelligence, culture, and other human differences.

The belief that some groups have an inherently superior culture, while others are less worthy, is unfortunately a deep-seated ideology in our history. For example, educational research literature on the experiences of Latinos/as in U.S. schools has historically been rooted in a deficit perspective (Flores, 2005). That is, rather than focus on school factors (funding, class size, curriculum, pedagogy, outreach efforts to families, tracking, disciplinary policies, and so on) and societal factors (inadequate health care, poor housing, lack of employment and educational opportunities for families, among others) that can lead to educational failure, the lack of educational success among Latinos/as has been largely attributed to cultural, linguistic and even genetic deficiencies. This is changing as new researchers begin to focus on sociocultural and sociopolitical factors that can influence schooling. At the same time, while deficit-centered research about Latino/a students has often been done by “outsiders” (i.e., individuals who are neither Latino/a nor who have been meaningfully connected to Latino/a communities), some scholars—primarily but not only Latino/a researchers—have challenged this deficit perspective for years (Cordasco, 1998; García, 2001; Nieto, 2000a; Romo & Falbo, 1996; Sánchez, 1940; Valencia, 1997; Valenzuela, 1999).

A growing body of research demonstrates how the lack of value placed on Latino/a students' cultural, linguistic, and experiential resources has been both cause and effect of the low quality education they have received throughout their time in U.S. schools (Irizarry & Nieto, 2010; MacDonald & Monkman, 2005). For example, both Mexican Americans in the Southwest and Puerto Ricans in the Northeast, the largest groups of Latinos/as in the U.S., have endured sustained efforts to significantly compromise their access to quality education through segregation, poor quality of instruction, "sink or swim" approaches to language learning, substandard facilities, lack of representation in the curriculum, and lack of representation in decision-making, among other factors (Bucchioni, 1982; Margolis, 1968; Nieto, 2000b; Pedraza & Rivera, 2005; Sánchez, 1940; Valencia, 2002). This lack of access to quality education comprises what some have viewed as acts of violence, both physical and symbolic (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992).

More recent examples of educational failure have been no less evident, although hope for change is also more apparent. Participatory Action Research, another hallmark of the NLERAP approach, is one hopeful approach to teaching, learning, and research in the Latino/a community.

Participatory Action Research (PAR)

A second fundamental principle of NLERAP is that community perspectives should be included in research. This means that research needs to be collaborative, engaging diverse community members as co-researchers in an investigative and action-oriented process (Torre & Ayala, 2009). Given this perspective, a PAR approach is fundamental to how research should be conducted. As such, NLERAP's first research project on arts in education both embraced a PAR philosophy and implemented a PAR methodology with school-based educators, community-based organizational staff, and university scholars, grounding our collective efforts in five principles: to root our work in critical scholarship and sociopolitical movements, to encourage democratic participation, to facilitate co-construction of knowledge, to incorporate a creative process, and to commit to action and social justice (Rivera, Medellín-Paz, Pedraza, et al., 2010).

A PAR approach also affirms the significance of Latino/a researchers as a force for transforming education because, until quite recently, the voices and perspectives of Latino/a researchers were nearly invisible in most of the research addressing the education of Latino/a youngsters (Pedraza & Rivera, 2005). PAR has emerged as a promising practice with the potential to improve educational experiences and outcomes for students of color (Camarrota & Fine, 2008). With a focus on engaging youth in research connected to the material and socioemotional conditions of their lives, PAR "is typically undertaken as critical scholarship, by multi-generational collectives, to interrogate conditions of social injustice through social theory with a dedicated commitment to social action" (Fine, 2008, p. 213). More than a tool for inquiry solely for use by experienced researchers in the ivory tower, PAR is deeply rooted in the struggle for social justice and educational equity. According to Ginwright (2008), "With an emphasis on democratizing knowledge, fostering critical inquiry of daily life and developing liberatory practices, PAR is both an art and a method to engage youth in democratic problem solving" (p. 14). As such, many of the scholars working on PAR projects with youth have documented societal changes brought about as a result of these efforts as well as the positive impact such projects have had on students' academic and personal development.

Documenting the power of engaging youth of color in PAR, David Stovall (2006) speaks to the struggles of Latino/a and African American youth to have their voices and perspectives included in the process of school reform in Chicago, Illinois. The students in his study collaborated on a proposal for a new community high school in their neighborhood, organizing a youth collective across lines of linguistic and cultural difference, collecting data, crafting the proposal and advocating for its adoption by the school board and city council. Their innovative proposal challenged the conventional power relations that too often dominate schools where students are perceived as empty vessels waiting to be filled by teachers rather than as active contributors to various aspects of school governance including curriculum design and discipline (Freire, 1970).

In another PAR project documenting the outcomes of a multi-year critical inquiry that engaged African American and Latino/a students, Ernest Morrell (2008) convincingly documented growth among student participants as a result of engaging in collaborative research that focused on simultaneously engaging students in

activism and improving their literacy skills. As a result of this project, which took place over the summer during school vacation, students became more critical consumers of text as well as skilled producers of textual products, giving presentations from their research at various professional meetings and conferences and developing skills essential to successfully navigating school and gaining access to higher education.

Documenting the power of student voice and the impact of participatory action research as a pedagogical tool, Jeffrey Duncan-Andrade (2007) described the findings of a study of critical media literacy and urban youth. In this research, students were involved in a summer seminar building on their consumption of electronic media. The goal of the project was to develop students' academic literacies through critiques of the media and the creation of counter narratives that challenged majoritarian narratives rooted in negative, stereotypical depictions of urban youth. Students disseminated their findings in a number of venues, including local and national conferences, through presentations that incorporated various forms of media representations. The benefits of this project are not limited to the youth engaged in research, but also extend to the audiences, including pre-service teachers and community members, to which they have presented their work.

Scholars engaged in PAR serve as bridges between students and their communities, and they help students (and the educators, administrators and community members) develop the skills they need to transform themselves and simultaneously challenge systemic structures that foster inequality. Unlike other approaches to instruction and research with Latino/a students that seek to collect data to inform a body of literature (often inaccessible to the general public) in hopes that it might positively influence the work of practitioners and policy makers, PAR directly engages participants through instruction in the process of identifying problems and creating and implementing solutions to address the issue. As a pedagogical tool, it fosters the development of academic skills at the same time that it promotes positive change based on student research.

While there is a wealth of research on teaching and teacher education, very little of it draws on the experiences and recommendations of youth. Deficit-centered literature regarding Latino/a students characterizes them, their families and communities as the "problem" and as the primary impediments to their own educational and personal success. Instead of being positioned as the "problem" within school reform efforts, youth involved in participatory action research directly address the issues they have identified. The skills students develop through these field-based research projects have been far-reaching, preparing them not only to meet state standards for graduation but also making them more active, critical consumers of democracy, one of the espoused goals of public education. In these studies, PAR serves as an "activist pedagogy" (Torre & Fine, 2008, p. 23), transforming the educational landscape and positively impacting the education of Latino/a students.

In an effort to offer promising, empirically-based strategies for improving student achievement, studies based on participatory action research and culturally responsive pedagogy (to be addressed in the Instructional section) with Latino/a youth offer new possibilities for classroom practice and community uplift. The research cited in this paper does not constitute an exhaustive list, but rather is meant to highlight the potential that exists when Latino/a youth have access to academically rigorous curricula that affirms their identities and engages them in the struggle for social justice and educational equity.

A Brief Demographic Portrait

Sonia Nieto

University of Massachusetts—Amherst

A demographic portrait, with particular emphasis on school-related issues, points to the dire situation of Latino/a education. According to the 2010 Census, the number of Hispanics (the term used in government data) currently was 50,477,594 million, an increase of 43 percent since 2000, making this group the fastest growing of all ethnic/racial groups in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Latinos/as represent 16 percent of the total U.S. population, meaning that they are the largest so-called “minority” group in the nation. Approximately 63 percent of Latinos/as living in the U.S. are of Mexican origin, 9 percent are Puerto Rican, 3.5 percent are Cuban, 3 percent are Salvadoran and 2.8 percent are Dominican, with smaller percentages of other Central American, South American or other Hispanic origin (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

Over half of all Hispanics resided in 3 states: California, Texas, and Florida. Nevertheless, the growth of the Hispanic population in other regions of the nation has been dramatic. The 2010 Census documented what many cities and towns throughout the nation had already experienced: between 2000-2010, the Hispanic population grew in every region, most significantly in the South and Midwest. One reason for this increase is that the number of Hispanics in states where they have not traditionally resided is growing exponentially. For example, in 2010, 36 percent of all Hispanics resided in the South, a growth of 57 percent since 2000, or 4 times the growth of the total population growth in the South. In the Midwest, the Hispanic population grew by 49 percent, or 12 times the growth of the total population in the South.

Not surprisingly, Latino/a children make up a large proportion of the growth of the community. For example, the percentage of Latino/a children within the general population increased from 12 percent (5.1 million) in 1990 to 23 percent (12.1 million) in 2010, making this the fastest growing group of children in the country (Aud et al., 2012). By 2020, it is estimated that one in every four children will be Hispanic, and according to one report, this is already the case in U.S. preschool and kindergarten classrooms (U.S. Census Bureau, 2007). A young population, there are 17.1 million Latinos/as aged 17 and younger in the U.S., more than 23 percent of the total age group in the nation. More than 12.4 million Hispanic children attend the country's elementary and secondary schools. Nevertheless, less than half of all Latino/a children have access to early learning programs, in spite of the fact that enrollment in such programs have been proven to improve the cognitive, social, emotional, and language development of children (Department of Education, 2011).

Although growing in number, the Hispanic population is still underserved in many ways. Strength in numbers alone, therefore, does not correlate with educational progress. For example, many Latino/a children live in poverty. A 2012 report found that 63 percent of Latino/a children lived in low-income families (what the National Center for Children in Poverty describes as the “near poor”), and 32 percent lived in poverty, compared with 31 and 13 percent of White children, respectively (Addy & Wight, 2012). As a result of segregated residential housing patterns, more Hispanic and African American students attend high-poverty schools (37 percent) than do Asian/Pacific Islander (12 percent) or White (6 percent) students (Aud et al., 2012). Consequently, the educational attainment of Latinos/as remains lower than that of any other group (Aud et al., 2012).

Where students attend schools adds to the problem. Urban areas, where most Latino/a students live, tend to have school systems with crumbling infrastructures and fewer resources than suburban schools. Because about 65 percent of Latino/a students live in large urban areas, many attend schools in economically distressed communities. For instance, 37 percent of Hispanic students attend high-poverty schools, that is, schools where 76 percent or more of the students are eligible for free or reduced lunch. In contrast, only 6 percent of White students attend high-poverty schools. At the elementary level, the percentage of Hispanics who attend high-poverty schools is even higher at 45 percent, while for White students it is 7 percent (Aud et al., 2012).

English Language Learners (ELLs), who represent a significant number of Latino/a students, are especially vulnerable. Numbering 4.7 million, they are about 10 percent of the nation's students in grades K-12 (Department of Education, 2011). In fact, data show that approximately 37 percent of ELLs are behind their White peers

in math and 47 percent are behind in reading. The situation worsens as they progress through the grades: by 8th grade, 51 percent of ELLs are behind Whites in both reading and math (Fry, 2008). Specifically, 72 percent of ELLs score below basic in reading and 74 below basic in mathematics (Department of Education, 2011). According to one report, when English Language Learners are not isolated in low-achieving schools, their gap in test score results is considerably narrower (Fry, 2008). Given recent trends in dismantling desegregation efforts, the future looks grim for Latino/a students who are segregated in low-achieving schools.

The dropout rate among Hispanic students has remained stubbornly high for decades, fluctuating anywhere between 40-80 percent depending on the year (Gandara & Contreras, 2009; Nieto, 2000b). Currently, only about half of all Latino/a students graduate from high school (Department of Education, 2011). Between 1980 and 2011, while the percentage of Hispanics who had attained a high school diploma or equivalency increased dramatically, from 58 to 71 percent, it was still markedly lower than for Whites at 94 percent and Blacks at 88 percent (Aud et al., 2012). At the postsecondary level, the numbers are also alarming. From 1980 to 2011, the gap in the attainment of a bachelor's degree or higher between Whites and Hispanics had widened from 17 to 26 percent (Aud et al., 2012). Just 13 percent of Latinos/as have a bachelor's degree and only 4 percent have completed graduate or professional degree programs (Department of Education, 2011).

All in all, the lack of academic success among Latinos/as presents serious implications that reverberate within and well beyond the Latino/a population. In the sections that follow, we discuss some of these implications through three lenses: *Interpersonal Relationships*, *Instructional Strategies*, and the broader *Institutional Context* of schools and society.

Sociocultural Perspectives on Interpersonal Relationships in Schools

Julio Cammarota

Luis Moll

Maria Gonzalez

University of Arizona

Chiara Cannella

Fort Lewis College

This incident happened in my junior year: I got into a confrontation with another girl and ended up getting suspended during the process. While I was still at school, I was taken into a counselor's office and was introduced to Ms. Costello. We started talking and found out that we had a lot in common. Our moms died about the same year, and I remember her saying "Oh, now I'll never forget you!" And she took a post note, wrote my name on it and stuck it on her computer. A lot of things were happening in my life at that time so, yes, it made me put a smile on my face.

Anyways, time went on and I came back [to] school . . . and me and her kind of walked by each other and me thinking that she was going to stop and say "hi!" She passed right by me and didn't even notice me. But what was weird was I know she saw me because she glanced at me. . . As soon as this happened I thought to myself "what the hell!" It was so [awkward]. When this [happened], I kept thinking to myself maybe she has too many students, and she's not good with faces. Then I realize[d] that . . . maybe it was all just fake, the way she acted that day. Maybe she didn't really care, she was just doing her "job" and she will get paid anyways so why would she care if I was remembered? Even to this day, when I see her, she has never said hi once. (Cristina's field notes)

Cristina is a high school student who exemplifies the importance of interpersonal relationships for success in school. She is committed to graduating and entering a professional program to become a medical assistant. She is motivated in her classes, making sure that all of her assignments have been received and recorded for mid-semester grades. But she also reports feeling nervous and uncomfortable in nearly all of her classes.

Cristina's description of her experience with Ms. Costello epitomizes missed opportunities to foster stronger interpersonal relationships in schools, thus investing in student success. Genuine interpersonal relationships are marked by respect for students' ethnicity and race. Missed opportunities do not necessarily happen simply because any particular people in schools—administrators, staff, or, teachers—do not care about their students, but rather because institutional and administrative practices and structures too often inhibit relationships of authentic care, as Angela Valenzuela (1999) describes, among students, adults, and peers in public schools. It requires intentional work to develop meaningful relationships in spite of these dynamics. At the same time, contemporary political issues of charters, privatization, school choice, and high levels of teacher turnover mitigate against developing meaningful relationships in school and these cannot be discounted in explaining why students and teachers are often unable to establish such relationships.

Research tells us that Latino/a students (as well as students from other marginalized racial and ethnic backgrounds) succeed in educational environments that support strong social relationships (Portes, Fernandez-Kelly, & Haller, 2008; Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco, & Todorova, 2007; Valenzuela, 1999). Cristina's story illustrates the potential for positive relationships within school, and the negative effect when students lack support and care. Cristina describes how the connection between an adult in school, Ms. Costello, and her was significant, even citing how all the other difficult things in her life made that positive experience more important to her. But perhaps even more significant than the initial positive bond between Ms. Costello and Cristina was how easily it turned sour, and how severely it pained this student. The resulting betrayal further alienated Cristina from school, fueling a lack of trust that school staff truly cared for her. This alienation is consistent in

her descriptions of nearly all her classes, because “to talk in any other class is just nerve wracking,” making her “nervous” that the teacher will say she has given the wrong answer, and causing her to feel “tense.” This tension makes it less likely that Cristina will attend school regularly, endangering her achievement.

This section explores the importance of interpersonal relationships for facilitating Latino/a students’ academic success, focusing on the way that dynamic notions of culture enhance our understanding of these crucial relationships. We discuss two types of relationships that support student success: relationships with adults in schools, and relationships with peers, family, and community members. Supportive social relationships among friends, adults, and families both in and out of school provide young Latinos/as with the grounding, knowledge and impetus to navigate the difficult waters of a highly competitive and often intolerant American society. Social scientists commonly categorize such helpful relationships as social capital (see Portes, 1998). We argue, however, that “culture”—when understood as the meaningful practices people engage in every day—lays the foundation for the development of constructive relationships and thus for the formation of social capital useful for educational achievement. Authentic interpersonal relationships recognize the role that race and ethnicity, among other identities, play in students’ everyday lives. As a consequence, respect for multiple facets of students’ identities help sustain students’ cultural practices.

Crucial to our discussion of culture and its application in schools and beyond is that formal and informal social practices can promote or inhibit constructive social relationships. Institutional practices in particular can inhibit the development of authentic relationships and undermine students’ chances to benefit from social support of their academic success. In contrast, an educational environment that promotes the cultural practices of Latino/a students engenders the interpersonal relationships among students, school staff, and parents that can lead to higher achievement. In what follows, we describe how social capital facilitates educational achievement, focusing on relationships as a form of social capital. We then describe how a comprehensive understanding of “culture” is critical for understanding how Latino/a students develop and access social resources.

Social Capital and Its Cultural Contents

When Coleman (1988) described Asian mothers buying extra textbooks for themselves to learn school lessons before they helped their children, the term *social capital* jumped to the forefront of the social sciences as well as the national imagination. A great deal of research has examined the role of social capital in school achievement (Anyon, 1997; Delpit, 1988; Fine, 1993; Lareau, 1987; Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995; Valenzuela & Dornbusch, 1994). However, Portes (1998) argues that widespread use of the term has caused inconsistency in its definition and application. He calls for a grounding of the term social capital with a definition forwarded by Pierre Bourdieu (1986), probably the first to apply the term in contemporary sociology. Bourdieu (1986) describes social capital as “durable networks” that are formed through “institutionalized relationships” which distribute resources—whether information, ideas, or opportunities—to those with access to these networks. The power to leverage social resources is a result of a web of social capital: social networks, educational qualifications, institutional connections, and economic resources. These resources allow individuals to access public institutions in economic, educational, political, and employment realms. Bourdieu’s (1986) conception of social capital focuses on its instrumentality for economic and social advancement, including education.

Bourdieu (1986) also emphasizes the cultural processes involved in the formation of social capital, which many contemporary scholars neglect in their treatments of the term. Culture entails the production and maintenance of practices, actions, and relationships that mark and sustain common aspects of identity, group membership and participation in social networks. Through shared cultural meanings and practices, members recognize other members of the same social group and hence those oriented to accessing its network. The distribution of resources among members of a social group occurs primarily through relationships formed in and through cultural practices. The institutionalization of culture and concomitant relations ensures that the network and patterns of participation in it persist over time.

This dynamic understanding of culture is in contrast with the simplified and essentialized version we so often hear about as set values, habits, and characteristics that children inherit and carry around with them like a schoolbag. In this framework of cultural determinism (González, 2008), culture is understood to dictate

peoples' actions so much so that it is used as both predictor and explanation of social outcomes. A discouragingly common example of this is the typical explanation for why Latino/a students do not score as high as White students on standardized tests: "Their families don't value education; it is just a cultural difference." This crude notion of culture too often leads to racial and ethnic generalizations, and concomitant identification of patterns of deficiency—educational, social, intellectual, or moral.

Culture is not a set of fixed behaviors, values, or habits that people of different traditions pass down to their children. Although ethnic, geographic, spiritual, and linguistic traditions are certainly important to how people construct their identities, these are neither fixed nor dictated by their "culture"; instead, we are concerned with peoples' ongoing and co-constructed social practices. This processual conception of culture in turn allows us to see social capital as adaptive and created through enduring and shifting processes of social agency. As a result, social capital can be understood as prospective, bearing the potential for on-going construction of relationships and knowledge building that support peoples' increasing ability to benefit from social institutions. Our conception of social capital is marked by adaptability, resilience, and dynamic social relationships that are mutually constructed in continuous negotiation across sociocultural contexts.

Sociocultural Capital in Latino/a Education

Constructive interpersonal relationships are crucial for success in school. When students experience support and respect from adults in their school, it increases their connection to their school, fostering higher achievement. In addition to support from adults, peer relationships can facilitate academic achievement and serve as key assets for many students. When young people are surrounded by friends who are academically oriented it increases their ability to attain success. In both cases, however, positive interpersonal relationships acknowledge and respect students' race and ethnicity.

A high level of respect for students' families, communities, and culture is one of the most effective means to tighten personal bonds among students, teachers, and parents (Cammarota, 2008; Delgado-Gaitán, 1991; McCarty & Watahomigie, 1998; Nieto, 2005; Valenzuela, 1999; Vélez-Ibáñez & Greenberg, 1992). But these relationships cannot function to encourage resilience if they challenge or denigrate the person's cultural practices or the value of their role in them. They must be consistent with and supportive of students' cultural practices and identity. The "funds of knowledge" framework (Moll et al., 2005) in which educators build on the cultures and experiences of students and their families is unfortunately another example of a missed opportunity because too often educators fail to validate and expand on the languages and knowledge that students bring to school.

Valenzuela (1999) describes well how institutional practices and structures can undermine students' existing capital, and inhibit the genuine relationships that support students' achievement. The administration in Valenzuela's (1999) study fosters an anti-Mexican environment, inhibiting substantive relationships with adults in the school, as well as the flow of intergenerational social networks.

The development of positive social relationships, and thus the acquisition of social capital, occurs through what Stanton-Salazar (1997) describes as "network orientation," or how people perceive both the value and purpose of that network and its corresponding capital. In describing network orientation, Stanton-Salazar (1997) advances our understanding of interpersonal relationships beyond common conceptions of social capital. This type of network orientation exemplifies how students may overcome constraining circumstances while positing culture as the key to equipping them to successfully negotiate mainstream institutions. But Stanton-Salazar's (1997; 2001) conceptualization excludes the myriad forms of cultural agencies and practices in which people engage as they transform their subjectivities and aspects of their orientations. This omission places at risk the crucial recognition that network orientations are mutually constructed social practices, and can be the locus of agency and cultural production.

We argue that a "network orientation" is linked to an individual's perception of their role within the cultural group, and how they see themselves as bearing potential to benefit from and, in the case of education and future economic benefits, eventually contribute to the capital available to members of the group. A fuller understanding of individual agency and cultural production are necessary to appreciate how a network orientation

is continually constructed among individuals and within groups, thus enhancing the formation of social capital.

Peer Groups, Family, and Community as Social Capital

Valenzuela (1999) argues that a nuanced cultural understanding of social capital is especially appropriate for “highlighting the effects of breakdowns or enhancements in the flow of school-related information and support” that students and their parents have access to in schools (p. 27). Yet the school administration in Valenzuela’s study fostered “a powerful, state-sanctioned instrument of cultural de-identification, or de-Mexicanization” (Valenzuela, 1999, p. 161). Because of the curriculum, teacher attitudes, and administrative and language-limiting policies in the school, being or acting Mexican, including speaking Spanish, was fraught with tension; as a result, many students ultimately attempted to minimize their association with Mexican people and social characteristics. These decisions may inhibit later generations from interacting with first-generation immigrants, whose networks function as academic social capital.

Valenzuela (1999) found that a “pro-school ethos” is critical to student achievement, and is facilitated by affiliation with academically oriented peers and access to exchanges such as homework sharing, computers, and study groups. She observed that “academic competence thus functions as a human capital variable that, when marshaled in the context of the peer groups, becomes a social capital variable” (Valenzuela, 1999, p. 28).

Peer groups can serve as a major form of social capital for students seeking academic attainment. An example from our research illustrates our discussion. We identified a group of eight first-generation Latina students from a Tucson high school which we refer to as the A.N.A., for “accommodate not assimilate” (a term first used by Margaret Gibson, 1988); this is in reference to the fact that these students are accommodating the behaviors that school requires for academic success, but also identifying themselves firmly as Mexican, without assimilating to mainstream cultural or language practices (Gibson, 1988; Mehan, Hubbard, & Villanueva, 1994; Portes, Fernández-Kelly, & Haller, 2008). These students sat in the front of the class, were rarely absent, remained focused on class discussion and activities, and excelled in their research assignments. They were all academically-oriented immigrant females who were preparing themselves not only to graduate but also to enroll in college.

Several characteristics of this group mark it as a site for the development of social capital among members. They supported each other not only as friends, often discussing matters pertaining to family and personal relationships, but they also helped each other with school assignments. It was not uncommon, when one of these students questioned the teacher or indicated that they did not understand, that one or two others would lean over and explain in Spanish. They shared information about homework, college recruitment and preparation, teachers, and which classes to take. The A.N.A.’s enacted their cultural identity by always speaking Spanish, and by seeking out and including in their circle recent immigrants who might otherwise struggle to “learn the ropes” at their new school.

Members of the A.N.A. peer group reflected very different academic abilities, from students receiving top grades to those barely passing. Much of this variation may be due to differences in English fluency; those students who struggled most in their classes had emigrated here more recently and were minimally able to engage in academic discussions or writing in English. The wide range of formal academic achievement means that higher achieving students were sharing their knowledge—redistributing their social capital—among struggling students. Research has long demonstrated that ability grouping reinforces failure among so-called “at risk” students (Mehan, Hubbard, & Villanueva, 1994; Mehan, Villanueva, Hubbard, & Lintz, 1996; Oakes, 1985). This group exemplifies how peer groups can overcome structural challenges to learning, generating new capital among members of the group who need it. Regardless of formal academic success, all of the A.N.A. students were supported in their efforts at school achievement through a social network that was based on—not in spite of—their cultural identities.

In addition to peer groups, networks located among family and the ethnic/cultural community may provide the emotional and cultural resources to counter the alienation and psychological distress that derive from structural antagonisms and institutional barriers. In other words, bonding culturally with others facilitates mental and emotional resilience and strengthens coping strategies; these can enable people to withstand the

structural constraints and institutional oppression that lead to adversarial stances and prevent young people from developing constructive relationships they need for institutional resources. Furthermore, communities and families can build supportive networks and provide cultural resources to break through the institutional barriers that prevent students from establishing relationships with resourceful agents. Ginwright, Cammarota, and Noguera (2005) have found that “for youth in communities, social capital is closely linked to connections with community-based organizations, intergenerational partnerships, and participation in broad networks of informational exchange about political issues, ideas, and events” (p. 33).

Teacher-Student Relationships

In Guererra's class, I feel important. Like, he cares that I'm there and stuff . . . I don't feel like he is pushing me out like the other ones. Like the other teachers are so negative. They are like, “if you miss one more day, you won't graduate.” He's not like that. He has **never** said that to me, ever. He's just, “Mija, make sure that you are doing something” you know, trying to help me. . . I feel like I do better because [Mr. Guererra] cares. That's one of the main things, why I like the class, 'cause he's not just there to get paid
It's different in that class. Like, you feel way more um, important, than just a student in the class.
(Cristina, interview)

In addition to the academically oriented peer groups that exemplify the social capital Latino/a students can develop, the interpersonal relationships they have with adults in schools are central to constructing academic identities. Given that most school time is spent in classrooms with teachers, it is no surprise that teachers represent a primary source of support – or lack of support – for academic development in schools. Teachers who develop genuine relationships with their students have a significant impact on students' academic orientation and success, as described by Cristina above.

Nieto (2005) expands the notion of a “highly qualified teacher” beyond acquiring subject matter knowledge, teaching and management skills, or a passing score on a state or national certification exam, to include the formation of relations of trust with students, especially when those students who are “vastly different from them in terms of background and experiences” (p. 7). Those types of trusting social relations may be established in a variety of ways, but generally include teachers respecting and taking an interest in the students and their particular experiences and connecting their teaching to those lived experiences, while establishing high expectations for academic learning (e.g. Rosebery & Warren, 2008).

Based on her interviews with outstanding teachers, Nieto (2005) posits several essential qualities that characterize their teaching. Among these qualities is teachers' willingness to question mainstream knowledge, whether this knowledge is found in mandatory textbooks, or otherwise sanctioned by authorities. This implies that teachers must also be constant learners, and continue developing professionally, enhancing their knowledge. A second characteristic is a disposition to love and stand in solidarity with students. As Nieto (2005) writes:

...it seems almost maudlin to speak about [love in relation to teaching], as if it were inconsistent with professionalism and academic rigor. Yet it is well established that teachers who love their students and feel solidarity with them also develop strong and meaningful relationships with them, an essential ingredient for students' affiliation with school. (p. 206)

A third characteristic is what Nieto (2005) calls “a passion for social justice,” that is, a motivation to engage issues such as racial discrimination, economic disparities, and other negative conditions in their schools or neighborhoods. It is the ideals of social justice and equity that help sustain teachers in the profession, even under difficult or foreboding circumstances, or in the face of resistance from peers or administrators to their emphasis on such principles. All of these characteristics also inform the instructional practices, or pedagogy, offered in schools, an issue to which we now turn.

Instructional Practices and Approaches

Sonia Nieto

University of Massachusetts—Amherst

Jason Irizarry

University of Connecticut

In Guererra's class, I feel important. Like, he cares that I'm there and stuff . . . I don't feel like he is pushing me out like the other ones. Like the other teachers are so negative. They are like, "if you miss one more day, you won't graduate." He's not like that. He has **never** said that to me, ever. He's just, "Mija, make sure that you are doing something" you know, trying to help me. . . I feel like I do better because [Mr. Guererra] cares. That's one of the main things, why I like the class, 'cause he's not just there to get paid

It's different in that class. Like, you feel way more um, important, than just a student in the class.

(Cristina, interview)

As documented in the demographic data presented earlier in this review and as demonstrated through Noemi's words above, large numbers of Latinos/as have not experienced academic success as measured by traditional indicators such as high school and college completion. In addition to addressing structural barriers impeding academic success, reversing this deleterious trend involves providing Latino/a students with genuine access to rigorous and culturally responsive curricula that respond to the material conditions of their lives. Unfortunately, too many Latino/a students languish in classrooms and schools where this is not the case.

In this section, we examine some of the historical instructional approaches that have been used with Latino/a students, and we analyze the impact these have had on their educational experiences and outcomes. We also highlight some participatory action research projects and culturally responsive pedagogy as promising instructional practices that have the potential to transform students' personal and professional trajectories as well as empower them with the skills to meaningfully participate in and transform society so that it is more inclusive and just. Drawing on these approaches provides a stunningly different vision for Latino/a education than is currently the case, one that can serve as a vehicle for both personal transformation and community empowerment.

A Brief Historical Overview of Instructional Strategies Used With Latino/a Students

The educational experiences of Latino/as have been characterized, among other realities, by segregated classrooms and schools, limited access to qualified teachers, corporal punishment, and "sink or swim" approaches to language learning. Historically, for example, Mexican Americans in the southwest were prevented from attending "Anglo" schools with better facilities and curricular materials. Parents and community members organized to combat the segregation of Mexican American students, winning important legal battles in Lemon Grove, California in 1931 and throughout the southwest, marking the first victories against school segregation policies and establishing legal precedent for the 1954 Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* (MacDonald & Monkman, 2005).

In Puerto Rico, during some periods of the U.S. colonization of the island beginning at the turn of the 20th century, schools were forced to operate in English, a language spoken by few of the students or teachers. The schools were renamed after famous figures in U.S. history, and the school curriculum was changed to introduce Puerto Ricans to the espoused benefits of American culture (Negrón de Montilla, 1975). In fact, English was imposed as the major language of instruction until 1949, more than five decades after the U.S. acquisition of the island. The education of Puerto Ricans on the mainland United States through the mid-twentieth century was equally problematic, characterized by instructional practices based on deficit perspectives (Flores, 2005),

corporal punishment for speaking Spanish in school (Cockcroft, 1995; Nieto, 2007), and discipline practices that have limited students' access to appropriate instruction (Drakeford, 2004).

Basing their perceptions of Latino/a students on standardized test scores as well as stereotypical, racist notions of Latino/a academic capabilities, teaching practices in these classrooms were often reflective of perceived low-levels of intelligence. While students in the upper tracks were being prepared for higher education or White-collar positions in the workforce, the education of most Latino/a students prepared them for menial jobs in the service industry that provided few, if any, opportunities for upward mobility. For example, according to Cockcroft (1995), in the early part of the 20th century “the *California Guide for Teaching Non-English Speaking Children* encouraged teachers to comb their students' hair, clean their faces, and present them to the class with the words ‘Look at José. He is clean’” (p. 29).

While past approaches to teaching Latino/a students may seem deplorable, there is evidence to suggest that despite efforts to change the situation, the current climate for Latino/a students is also oppressive. For example, as a result of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2002 – the federal legislation that purports to improve the performance of all students through the use of standardized tests – many teachers in schools labeled as “underperforming” have narrowed their curricula to focus solely on the content that will appear on the state tests. This “test prep pedagogy” (Rodriguez in Liou, 2008) approach to teaching and learning has resulted in the elimination of “specials,” that is, classes such as music, art, and physical education, among others. In some schools, even science and social studies (subjects not yet included in the tests) are sacrificed. In addition, many school districts have purchased curricular materials based on “skill and drill” approaches that simulate the skills students need to pass the test while they ignoring the critical thinking and other skills that students need if they are to become active participants in a democratic society. Schooling for many Latino/a students has thus become a barrage of test preparation rather than meaningful learning. Schools that fail to make adequate yearly progress, or *ayp* (determined in part by scores on standardized tests which are fraught with problems including cultural bias; see, for example, Abedi & Gándara, 2006), are often penalized. Consequently, structural inequalities are exacerbated, making it more difficult, if not impossible, to provide students with the same facilities and resources as their more privileged peers.

The stated goal of NCLB – to close gaps in achievement between White students and “minority” students – is a positive one. Yet, because of its focus on testing and Standard English literacy, NCLB has been particularly harmful for recent Latino/a immigrants for whom English is not a primary language (Rodriguez, 2007). Although NCLB is a relatively new law, it has had a devastating impact on instructional practices, and has resulted in metaphoric leaks along what some scholars have referred to as the “educational pipeline” (De Jesús & Vázquez, 2005; Yosso, 2006), further exacerbating the dropout crisis and low achievement levels described earlier.

While the situation is dire, there have been rays of light within an otherwise dismal picture. An emerging body of literature highlights the journeys of Latino/a students who have been able to successfully navigate the system (Antrop-González, Vélez, & Garrett, 2005; Conchas, 2006; Gándara, 1982; Gándara, 1995; Irizarry & Antrop-González, 2007). This literature challenges deficit perspectives regarding Latino/a students and families, making important contributions to our understanding of underachievement by examining factors that might instead foster high academic achievement. These factors include some of the social and cultural support networks described in other sections of this paper. Understanding the factors that contribute to student success can help researchers and practitioners create learning experiences that promote achievement among Latino/a students. In what follows, we discuss several promising practices and innovative approaches to Latino/a education.

Promising and Innovative Approaches to Latino/a Education

Numerous research projects have documented the adverse impact of schooling on Latino/a students (Conchas, 2001; Portes & Rumbaut, 1996; Quiroz, 2001; Trueba, 1998; Valdés, 2001). Several studies point to specific aspects of schooling – including culturally insensitive teachers and administrators, curriculum that is disconnected from the histories and lived experiences of Latinos/as, and poor learning environments – as root causes for Latino/a underachievement (McQuillan, 1998; Nieto, 2007; Noguera, 2007). As a result of these conditions, Latino/a students are often disengaged, alienated, and disconnected from school. At the same time,

throughout their history in the U.S., Latinos/as have challenged institutional forms of oppression in the schooling of their children, resulting in research-based, promising approaches. More recently, scholars in the fields of participatory action research and culturally responsive pedagogy have documented the findings of their work, offering new possibilities for Latino/a education. Although not widespread or systematically implemented, there is empirical evidence to suggest that these approaches have positively influenced the educational experiences and academic outcomes of Latino/a students.

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy and Latino/a Students

A promising practice gaining traction within schools serving Latino/a students is culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP). Also referred to as *culturally relevant* (Ladson-Billings, 1994), *culturally congruent* (Au & Kawakami, 1994), and *culturally sensitive pedagogy* (Jacob & Jordan, 1987), this kind of pedagogy refers to the effective instructional implementation of multicultural education, building on students' cultures to promote their academic achievement. The work of Ana María Villegas and Tamara Lucas (2002) offers a vision of culturally responsive teaching by describing the characteristics they believe teachers should embody. According to their research, culturally responsive teachers: 1) *are socio-culturally conscious*, meaning that teachers understand that peoples ways of being and thinking are influenced by a variety of factors including race, class, gender and language; 2) *have positive views regarding students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds*; 3) *act as agents of change*, embodying a sense of commitment and skills to using teaching as a platform for engaging students in social change; 4) *have constructivist views of learning* where students are encouraged to make meaning of their experiences and academic content; 5) *know their students well* and affirm the “funds of knowledge” (Moll & Gonzalez, 1997) that are present in their students' communities; and 6) *are able to incorporate the knowledge of the students, families and communities* they serve into their teaching. Villegas's and Lucas's (2002) comprehensive overview provides a clear goal for teachers and teacher educators and offers strategies to lessen the cultural conflict that can emerge between teachers and students in diverse classrooms.

Certainly, CRP has the potential to positively influence the education of students, particularly for those whose cultural identities and histories have been maligned or completely disregarded by schools (Nieto, 1998). However, it is imperative that conceptualizations of culture as it relates to CRP remain fluid and multidimensional and avoid essentialization. Notions of fluidity and cultural hybridity have characterized the literature regarding culturally responsive pedagogy for Latino/a students. For example, *centering pedagogy*, a framework introduced by Carmen Rolón (Nieto & Rolón, 1997), “consists of instructional and curricular approaches that begin where students are at—experientially, cognitively, psychologically, and socio-politically—in order to move them beyond their own particular experiences” (Nieto, 2003, p. 54).

To address the fluid nature of culture, Kris Gutierrez and Barbara Rogoff (2003) use a cultural-historic approach to help “researchers and practitioners characterize the commonalities of experience of people who share a similar cultural background, without ‘locating’ the commonalities within the individual” (p. 21). This perspective deliberately describes culture not as a set of fixed traits or immutable characteristics but instead focuses on *cultural practices*. Essentializing culture and further marginalizing members of cultural groups that have been oppressed, they argue, can be avoided by understanding how group members' participation in fluid cultural practices of various communities and their distinct histories and experiences help *shape* – although they do not *determine* – their identities.

Recent research by Jason Irizarry (2007) describes practices that Latino/a students have identified as culturally responsive. Drawing from data collected through classroom observations and in-depth interviews with a group of Latino/a high school students and their African American teacher, Jason Irizarry (2007) posits that culturally responsive pedagogy must be more broadly conceptualized to address the cultural identities of students who have complex identities because of their experiences with peers of many varied identities, those whose urban roots have resulted in hybrid identities, and those who are multiethnic/multiracial.

Although much of the research literature regarding culturally responsive pedagogy focuses on single-group studies (i.e. Mexican-Americans or African Americans), Irizarry (2007) suggests a framework for culturally responsive pedagogy that is rooted in a view of culture as fluid and multidimensional, that is, one that acknowledges

the diversity within and across cultural groups and accounts for the development of hybrid identities. This view of culturally responsive pedagogy calls for teachers to move beyond treating cultural groups as monolithic entities and develop approaches to teaching that acknowledge, affirm and respond to the various sources from which individuals draw to create their identities.

Attempting to explain the low levels of achievement among Chicano students, Enrique Trueba (1991) found that there is a relationship between the support of students' language and culture and their school adjustment. He conducted research in two underperforming school districts in southern California and focused on developing culturally appropriate methodologies for teaching English. In his research, Trueba (1991) found that the teachers in the study, the majority of whom were White monolingual English speakers, had negative views about the potential of their students and did not believe the students could be successful. Nevertheless, when the classrooms were reorganized into smaller communities within the larger class context and built on issues that were important to the students in their writing assignments, students acquired essential literacy skills and made positive changes in their schools and communities.

In addition to documenting the academic benefits of culturally responsive pedagogy, Menchaca (2001) found other positive impacts of a culturally relevant curriculum. Illustrating culturally congruent lessons for Mexican American students, Menchaca (2001) integrated content related to the Mexican American experience in language arts, health, science, and social studies. This included, for instance, using familiar foods in a health lesson about food groups and drawing on students' familiarity with Mexican flora and fauna in teaching science. Like all of the scholars in this review, Menchaca (2001) asserts that learning is most meaningful when it is connected to, and reflective of, the experiences of the learner.

In sum, culturally responsive pedagogies that account for the fluid and multidimensional aspects of culture have the potential to improve the academic achievement, sense of efficacy, and feeling of belonging of Latino/a students. The studies mentioned here, as well as others (Moll, 1992; Wortham & Contreras, 2002), focus on foregrounding the cultural knowledge in Latino/a communities to foster the academic and personal success of students. While still an emerging body of research, CRP suggests that as teachers search for strategies to improve student achievement, it is imperative that their approaches build on students' cultural identities and the strengths students bring with them to the classroom.

Examples of PAR as an Instructional Strategy

Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) is emerging as a potentially transformative pedagogical approach with Latino/a students. Notably, the work of the Social Justice Education Project (SJEP), located at a high school in the Tucson Unified School District (Romero, Cammarota, Dominguez, Valdéz, Ramírez, & Hernández, 2008) enrolls students across three different high schools in a series of credit-earning social science courses aimed at addressing the educational, personal and professional needs of Latino/a students. Using a critical pedagogical framework (Freire, 1970), the project engages Latino/a students in the study of structural issues that impede their access to quality education and obstruct their full participation in civic life. Through participation in SJEP, students conduct research and present their recommendations for addressing issues of social injustice at various community engagements as well as academic conferences and professional meetings. The sites for research include neighborhoods, schools, peer groups, and workplaces so that the students' social contexts are key milieus for study and analysis.

The knowledge gathered in their analyses is not limited to cultural aspects, but also emerges from understanding how social relationships may impede or enhance their life chances (Cammarota, 2007; Cammarota, 2008; Ginwright & Cammarota, 2007). SJEP's social justice orientation fosters the formation of academically orientated social networks that build on students' cultures to advance school achievement. Contrary to conventional compensatory programs that seek to increase academic achievement by focusing on institutional literacy, the success of this program comes from its explicit embrace of students' home cultures and their intellectual capacities to bring social change to schools and communities.

Another YPAR project engaging Latino/a youth is illustrated in research by Jason Irizarry (2009). Dubbed Project FUERTE (Future Urban Educators conducting Research to transform Teacher Education), participants

in this research collaborative critically examine the quality of education in urban schools and develop research-based recommendations aimed at improving the educational experiences, opportunities, and outcomes for students who have been traditionally underserved by schools. A significant feature of the project is to encourage students of color to consider teaching as a profession. Project FUERTE, therefore, not only aims to transform the preparation of teachers but also to diversify the teaching force by “home-growing” teachers of color for urban schools. Student researchers participating in the project are enrolled in a social science elective course entitled Action Research and Social Change, where they learn skills in conducting research that will simultaneously enhance their academic skills and address issues related to the material conditions and socio-emotional aspects of their lives. Class sessions and assignments focus on generating research questions and learning the skills necessary to answer them. Students are encouraged to draw from a variety of “funds of knowledge” including, but not limited to, existing research in their areas of interest, various electronic databases, and community resources. A primary goal of the course is to familiarize students with the conventions of ethnographic research as a means of exploring the ways in which power and opportunity manifest themselves in urban schools and to consider the implications of their findings for teacher education.

The findings from both of these studies identify and challenge those policies and practices that serve to limit opportunities for personal and academic success among Latinos/as. The work of Romero et al. (2008) and Irizarry (2009) also document positive outcomes for student participants, including increases in academic achievement and the development of critical consciousness. Instead of being positioned as “problems” within school reform efforts, Latino/a student participants in the aforementioned YPAR projects are assets, asserting themselves in decision-making processes that directly impact – yet typically exclude – youth. Moreover, because they are grounded in schools, these projects offer potentially liberatory spaces within institutions that have, by and large, underserved Latino/a students and families.

Institutional and Structural barriers to Latino/a Achievement

Angela Valenzuela

Emmanuel Garcia

University of Texas—Austin

Harriett Romo

Beatrix Perez

University of Texas—San Antonio

Luz María was a female Mexican immigrant in the all-English, regular track in a Houston, Texas high school. She worked after school as an apprentice in a flower shop. As a gifted musician and an A and B student in her senior year with a 3.0 grade point average, she was set to be the first of her entire extended family to have ever attended college. Luz and her group of musician friends had all planned to leave home together to attend Texas State University in San Marcos, Texas. Leaving home as part of a group was the only way her parents would agree to the idea of her going to a college outside of her home town. However, Luz's plans were derailed when she failed to pass Texas' standard exit exam after multiple attempts. Even after taking remedial test-prep courses for two consecutive semesters, Luz failed the reading portion of the state exam. Luz María not only lost the opportunity to go to college, but she also never graduated from high school despite having earned all of her credits and otherwise meeting the necessary course-related requirements for graduation.

The case of Luz María demonstrates how even academically outstanding, talented, and mature Latino/a youth can fall victim to rigid institutional and structural policies, practices, and barriers. The problem of low academic attainment for Latino/a students may be a result of the situation at the K-12 levels, a situation that is beyond the control of students or their families (Martínez, 2003). Analyses of school success must take into account the social and political hierarchies in schools, school systems, and communities, as well as the economy and class-based institutional resources, such as living wage, adequate housing, and associations with economically stable social networks that influence educational opportunities and outcomes (Stanton-Salazar, 2001). While there are many institutional and structural barriers that can impede academic success for Latinos/as, we focus here on just some of the most salient obstacles including particularly through the No Child Left Behind law; the impact of poverty on achievement; the dropout crisis; teacher quality; special education; and immigrant and language issues. Many students, discouraged and defeated by these barriers, drop out of school before graduation or decide not to continue onto higher education. Others overcome these obstacles by sheer determination, assistance provided by educational or community programs, or the interventions of caring teachers and administrators. Eradicating these structural barriers and policies is a critical component for Latino/a school success and warrants further investigation into how such obstacles operate and how they can be effectively mitigated, overcome, and eliminated.

To be clear NCLB was not the first instance of this high-stakes testing logic at the federal level. Still it does serve as the culmination of this school reform rationale. In addition, while examining the act and its effects, we should keep in mind the limitations of federal intervention and the predominant role of the states within the education policy-making system.

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB): Accountability and the Testing Regime

On January 8, 2002, President George W. Bush signed into law the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, reauthorizing the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (DOE, 2002). The federal education act marked a historic reform of the public education system based on four key pillars, namely, accountability, school choice,

flexible usage of federal funds, and an emphasis on practices and programs deemed to be effective by “scientifically-based research” as defined rather inflexibly by NCLB (DOE, 2004). While these pillars may seem an appropriate and adequate basis for school reform, several of the act’s guidelines impose an unnecessarily rigid system that has deleterious consequences for many Latino/a youth. For example, if schools do not make adequate yearly progress after five years, they must make dramatic changes to the way the school is run or risk closure (DOE, 2004). Along the way, parents have the option to transfer their child from failing schools to better-performing public or charter schools (DOE, 2004). These principles hold serious complications for schools in minority communities that have historically been inequitably funded and understaffed, and where families often feel marginalized. To be clear, NCLB was not the first instance of this high-stakes testing logic at the federal level. Still, it does serve as the culmination of this school reform rationale. In addition, while examining the act and its effects, we should keep in mind the limitations of federal intervention and the predominant role of the states within the education policy-making system.

The intense focus on standardized test scores leads to the use of a single indicator of school performance as the basis of what makes a good school. Add to this the punitive measures imposed on school districts when scores are low, and we have an environment in which the pressure to improve is transferred through the education system to teachers and students (McNeil, 2000a). At the classroom level, these pressures inadvertently foster a shift from the teaching of content to the teaching and learning of how to take a standardized test (McNeil, 2000a; McNeil & Valenzuela, 2001; Valenzuela, 2005), thus creating a perverse incentive to narrow curricula in order to concentrate on improving test scores and inhibiting the development of innovative pedagogical practices. The result is immense pressure on school administrators to raise test scores at the expense of curricular goals and approaches that add depth to, and diversify, students’ learning experiences. Such an environment leads to disproportionate student disengagement in learning, resulting in high dropout rates, particularly for minorities and impoverished youth.

In many schools across the nation, NCLB’s focus on testing and strict measures of accountability have resulted in the abandonment of approaches to education that build on students’ cultures and native languages, such as dual language and other bilingual education programs (Capps, Fix, Murray, Ost, Passel, & Herwanto, 2005; Fine et. al., 2007). Critics of NCLB and its impact on Latino/a students in general, and on English language learners in particular, have not sought to lower the standards or release schools from their responsibility to educate all students to high levels of achievement. Rather, they have called upon legislators and school administrators to pay more attention to the quality of education that students receive and the conditions under which they learn (De Cohen & Deterding, 2005; Darling-Hammond, 2007).

Rather than focus on tests that do little to improve the quality of education, we suggest that other institutional issues, both in and outside of school, need to be addressed. These include poverty, the dropout crisis, teacher quality, and special education and language issues, all of which are described below.

Poverty and Achievement

It is clear that numerous institutional trends, practices, and policies beyond the control of students and their parents influence achievement, the effectiveness of instruction, and the social development of youth. But demographic and economic trends such as poverty, racial and ethnic diversity in schools, mobility, as well as homelessness and other social patterns, also affect schools and students (Cunningham, 2003). For example, migration patterns bring increasing numbers of immigrant students to schools that are ill equipped to serve their needs. Also, a disproportionate number of minority youth are negatively affected by unstable housing and inadequate funding of public schools.

As children are forced into a cycle of movement from school to school, residential instability due to inadequate and unaffordable housing leads to school mobility. Poverty contributes to homelessness and to the placement of children in foster care. In addition to the emotional challenges they face, homeless and foster care children also confront academic challenges because the curriculum often changes from school to school (Fantuzzo & Perlman, 2007). Children in multiple foster care placements are especially vulnerable as they experience frequent school mobility when they are moved between foster homes, group homes, shelters,

and treatment facilities (Titus, 2007; Conger & Finkelstein, 2008). In addition, movement between schools interrupts young people's ability to build caring relationships with teachers, mentors and peers. Adolescents, in particular, are often reluctant to form friendships at school if they know they will be moving again (Julianelle & Foscarinis, 2003).

Minority children are overrepresented in homeless and foster care populations and have been traditionally underserved by child welfare agencies (Church II, 2006). In addition, Latino/a foster care children may be further disenfranchised if their foster parents lack cultural awareness and knowledge of the unique situation and background of their foster children. These placements may also lead to diminished social networks in the school setting (Church II, 2006). Inappropriate academic placements can also further marginalize Latino/a foster children. A former foster youth explained her placement in special classes and how it affected her academically: "They put me in these behavioral program classes and it was a downfall because I got behind in subjects and I was exempt all the time. It was easier for me to graduate because they exempted me (from the state test required for graduation)... It was pretty bad." She continued, "...I'm still behind. I think I'm behind because I think I would have been all caught up, but they put me in those classes..." (Perez & Romo, 2009a).

The Dropout Crisis

Dropout rates have been another persistent and thorny reality in the education of Latinos/as for many years (Margolis, 1968; Orfield, 2004). According to the National Center for Education Statistics, or NCES (2006), the dropout rate among Hispanics is 28 percent, compared with 7 percent for Whites and 13 for Blacks. The numbers are even bleaker for foreign-born Hispanics: in 2007 the status dropout rate for Hispanics 16- to 24-year-olds who were born outside the U.S. was 34 percent—higher than the rate for native-born Hispanics (11 percent) (NCES, 2010). The dropout rate among Latinos/as has remained consistently high for over the past half century, in some cases nearly 80 percent, depending on how the rate is determined (Nieto, 2000a).

Each year in growing numbers and at an alarming rate, Latino/a students across the country fail to complete high school "on time" or obtain a General Educational Development (GED) certificate. However, because the dropout rate is calculated in very different ways across local, state, and federal agencies, there is little consistency in statistics. According to a study released by The Civil Rights Project (CRP) and the Urban Institute in 2004, while the graduation rate for White students is 75 percent, only approximately half of Black, Hispanic, and Native American students earn regular diplomas alongside their classmates (Orfield et al., 2004). According to Gary Orfield, the report's lead author, "Because of misleading and inaccurate reporting of dropout and graduation rates, the public remains largely unaware of this educational and civil rights crisis" (Orfield et al., 2004). Educational research and personal narratives emerging from the Latino/a community suggest that dropout rates may in fact be underreported because many youngsters drop out before high school, while others are either undercounted or not counted at all, including those in juvenile detention and those who are undocumented, among others (Conchas, 2001; Noguera, 2003; Valencia et al., 2002).

These national trends are exacerbated when we focus on particular regions and states across the country. In the southern states of Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, and North Carolina, graduation rates in 2002 reportedly ranged from a high of 85 percent in North Carolina to a low of 61.8 percent in Georgia (Wald & Losen, 2005). When the Cumulative Promotion Index (CPI)¹ was used, the graduation rates for these states sank well below these official estimates. Similar to national trends, the CPI method revealed that Black and Latino/a students fared worse than their Anglo counterparts. In Georgia, the rates for Blacks, Latinos/as and Native Americans were all below 50 percent (Wald & Losen, 2005).

In the state of Texas, the dropout rate hovers around 33 percent, which is about 20 points higher than official statistics compiled by the Texas Education Agency (Scharrer, 2007). In the class of 2005, more than 119,000 Texas students failed to graduate (Gottlob, 2007). Given the history and high dropout rate among

¹ The Cumulative Promotion Index (CPI), was designed by Christopher Swanson. The method is based on the combined average success of groups of students moving from ninth grade to tenth grade, from tenth grade to the eleventh grade, from eleventh grade to twelfth grade, and from twelfth grade to graduation, at the district and state level. The method sees graduation as an incremental process and allows for comparisons across years, districts, and states.

Latinos/as in the state, as well as the fact that 87 percent of the net increase in the Texas population (and two-thirds of its labor force), is projected to be people of color, we can understand why scholars say that, “Texas must invest in the socioeconomic improvement of its minority populations...” (Murdock et al., 1997).

California reports a robust overall graduation rate of 86.9 percent, but when the CPI method is used, the 2002 overall graduation rate was 71 percent (Civil Rights Project, 2005). The graduation rates in individual districts and schools, mainly those with large proportions of impoverished and minority youth, reflect dangerous national trends. Sixty-four percent of all students in central city districts graduate with regular diplomas (Civil Rights Project, 2005). Racially segregated districts fare no better; only 65 percent of students in segregated districts graduate compared with 58 percent when the metric used is socioeconomic class (Civil Rights Project 2005). According to Julie Mendoza of the University of California All Campus Consortium on Research for Diversity (UC/ACCORD), “Black and Latino/a students are 3 times more likely than White students to attend a high school where graduation is not the norm and where less than 60 percent of ninth graders obtain diplomas four years later” (see Civil Rights Project, 2005). In the state’s largest district, Los Angeles, only 48 percent of Black and Latino/a students who start 9th grade complete grade 12 four years later (Civil Rights Project, 2005).

Despite the grim news of the dropout situation across the country, several policies and programs have an opportunity to stem the tide and possibly reverse these dangerous trends. In the 80th session of the Texas State Legislature, the state approved the passage and implementation of House Bill (HB) 2237. The bill was the legislature’s combined effort to attempt to reduce the dropout rate and begin to obtain more reliable data. HB 2237 provided \$140 million dollars to fund a variety of programs in the preparation and continued education of teachers, dropout prevention, and college readiness (García, 2008). At the core of several of the grant programs was a concept of partnership across the public and private sectors, including local businesses, community organizations, institutions of higher education, and local school districts. Among these programs was a micro-grant program of extra-curricular activities (Section 29.095 of HB2237) developed by the Office of the Speaker of the House and the Texas Center for Education Policy (TCEP) at the University of Texas at Austin (García, 2008). The grant program provides state and local funding for extra-curricular activities that enroll “at-risk”² youth. Its structure provides the opportunity for teachers to employ innovative activities that engage these youth and facilitate the development of support structures (García & Valenzuela, 2007). While HB 2237 is certainly not perfect by any means, and it did not address the tough issue of inequities in public school finance or the often perverse pressures of testing and public school accountability, it nevertheless serves as a building block for a concerted effort to improve schools and reduce the dropout rate. Still, no one bill or strategy alone can deal with the magnitude of the challenge ahead of us. Systemic reform will require much more than a few innovative grant programs.

Teacher Quality

Teacher quality has serious consequences for Latino/a children. In fact, some experts have concluded that much of the low achievement blamed on children and parents is actually the result of depriving the neediest students of the best-qualified teachers (Darling Hammond, 2000, 2004b). Overall, the quality of a school’s teaching staff is an organizational property that varies across schools and is strongly related to differences in student achievement and growth (Heck, 2007). A Tennessee study has demonstrated that teacher effectiveness is the single most powerful factor in student achievement, 10 to 20 times as significant as the effects of other factors affecting student academic gain (Haycock, 1998). In another study, consistent effective teaching resulted in a gain of more than 35 percentile points in reading test scores with similar gains in math scores (Sanders & Rivers, 1996). The researchers attributed a difference of a full 50 percentile points in math test scores to teacher effectiveness.

Other teacher-related issues that influence children’s achievement are lack of experience, salary gaps, and high turnover. The lack of preparation and inexperience of teachers in urban schools contributes to students’ poor academic outcomes and has been referred to as the “teacher gap” (Cunningham, 2003). Barth

² This study acknowledges that terms such as “minority”, “limited English proficiency”, “dropout”, and “at-risk” have negative connotations and are demeaning to the groups they describe. These terms will be used only when used in the original research or report cited.

(2000) revealed that schools with higher concentrations of Latino/a and African American students had teachers with lower scores on certification exams, less experienced teachers in the classroom, and a higher number of uncertified teachers as compared to more affluent White schools. Hispanic, African American, and low-income students are most likely to be assigned teachers who do not know their subject matter very well or who are not certified (The Education Trust, 2008). They also tend to be unprepared to teach English language learners. In a letter to President Obama before he took office, the Institute for Language and Education Policy (ILEP, 2008) reported that 43 percent of U.S. teachers had English language learners in their classrooms, yet only 11 percent of them were certified in bilingual education and only 18 percent were certified in English as a Second Language. The ILEP (2008) concluded that, “expertise in second-language acquisition, multicultural awareness, and effective classroom practices are largely lacking among staff responsible for educating these students.” In addition, when urban schools use less prepared teachers, long-term substitutes, and alternatively certified teachers, students are recipients of lower de facto funding (Reyes, 2003). In New York, for example, highly qualified teachers tend to transfer or quit due to challenging conditions in large urban schools as compared to those in affluent suburban schools (Lankford, Loeb, & Lankford, 2002).

One parent interviewed in a study of a parent-school collaboration in an urban school district serving primarily Latino/a students noted that some of the teachers assigned to urban schools have little experience and understanding of the obstacles facing urban and migrant students:

“I think some of the teachers that are from this area understand it, because, of course, they grew up here, and then some of the teachers who have recently come here, they’re slowly getting used to it. But I think there are still others that don’t really understand. How can I put it? I think some of the teachers don’t understand where these kids are coming from, and even though they try to figure it out, it’s just not clicking. A lot of the teachers are from, you know, nice families with good money and they don’t have to worry about the same things these kids are worrying about, so they don’t think about it when they are here.” (Romo et al., 2008)

The majority of pre-service teachers in the U.S. are White females and, because of the increased segregation of the nation’s schools, they are likely to have had little personal experience with ethnic or racial minorities in their own schooling. Research by Marx (2003) using data from stories teachers told about their teaching demonstrated that many new teachers’ altruistic intentions were undermined by an uncritical embrace of covert racist ideologies and deficit thinking. Teachers who have had little contact with Latino/a families are unlikely to understand the rich support of social and family networks that exist in Latino/a communities. On the other hand, culturally competent teachers can incorporate students’ “funds of knowledge” into the classrooms (Moll, González, Amanti, & Neff, 1992).

As mentioned previously, the work of Angela Valenzuela (1999) introduced the notion of “subtractive” schooling, that is, schooling in which policies, practices, school staff, and teachers ignore or devalue the home culture and linguistic knowledge of Mexican origin students, thus effectively stripping them of much of the social and cultural capital, potential, and perspective that they could bring into the classroom. She demonstrated the importance of teachers and institutional structures that value and actively promote positive connections between teachers and students, as well as among students themselves. She noted that this sense of authentic caring is especially important when it is directed toward students who are culturally different from the majority. Friendly institutional structures and effective administrators and teachers are instrumental in establishing a culture of caring and effective schooling. Family-like school environments created by teachers and school staff contribute to students’ “sense of belonging” (Nieto, 1998) and enhance the importance of caring teacher-student relationships.

Rather than blame students and their families, effective schools and teachers work with communities and families to achieve student success (Cortina, 2003). They build pride in identity into strategies that reinforce academic and social growth and that support the cultures, languages, and diversity that students bring to their schools. These culturally responsive teachers understand that schools and teaching styles need to accommodate the needs of students.

A program at the University of Texas at San Antonio gives Head Start teachers who understand the cultural and linguistic barriers faced by the lowest income students an opportunity to become better-qualified in terms of formal credentials and knowledge while earning Associates and Bachelors degrees. The program helps these culturally sensitive teachers overcome structural barriers of attending college (barriers such as tackling on-line registration, consulting with academic advisors, structuring degree plans, applying for financial aid, and choosing classes) so that they can be successful in higher education. Many go on to graduate with honors and return to their classrooms better prepared to teach. The majority of these teachers experienced structural barriers in earlier schooling or lacked financial supports to attend college. Support services, a family-like learning community, and caring staff helped them overcome obstacles that would have prevented them from becoming successful certified teachers.

The Puente Project in California provides a model of a caring high school environment. This program identified five bridges to students' success: family involvement, culturally enriched teaching and intensive instruction, counseling, mentoring, and positive peer support (Cooper, 2002). The success of Puente 9th and 10th grade students demonstrates that programs that incorporate student and community cultures, high expectations for all students to succeed, increased levels of skills and competencies, and social capital (i.e., bonding of students to each other, teachers, counselors and administrators) can help alter tracking systems and ultimately improve student achievement (Cazden, 2002). This program shows how positive schooling experiences are a collaborative effort by a complete team of students, parents, teachers, administrators, and community agencies.

Special Education

The misdiagnosis and identification of Latino/a students in special education has been a long-term concern. In fact, research has revealed that Latino/a students are six times more likely than the general student population to be placed in special education programs (Medina & Luna, 2004). Latino/a students are also more likely to be incorrectly assessed as mentally retarded or learning disabled (Fletcher & Navarette, 2003). Overall, the literature points to a key structural factor, the racial composition of school districts, as the most powerful indicator of special education enrollment. Predominantly White school districts hold higher percentages of minorities in special education than large minority districts (Fletcher & Navarrete, 2003). This suggests that cultural and linguistic responsiveness need to be addressed in appropriately identifying students with learning disabilities. Specifically, García and Ortiz (2006) and Fletcher and Navarrete (2003) all emphasize the importance, as well as the unique challenges, of understanding student sociocultural, linguistic, racial/ethnic and other background characteristics throughout the evaluation process.

Timely support systems are critical for struggling learners and may reduce inappropriate special education referrals. Prevention and intervention can help resolve the problem of academic difficulty caused by factors that are not true learning disabilities, such as differences in culture and language (García & Ortiz, 2006; Medina & Luna, 2004). According to Pérez et al. (2008), it is essential to examine identifying criteria, definitions, and the appropriateness of assessment tools used to determine eligibility for special education assistance, particularly when assessing English language learners. Historically, learning disabilities have been tied to biological and neurological issues, thus placing the onus on the child and the family. On the other hand, Fletcher and Navarette (2003) argue that this is a misguided assumption as other factors such as language development and acculturation are also at play. Medina and Luna (2004) found that Latino/a students in special education classes were largely disengaged and disenchanted with their schooling experiences and experienced alienation, disinterest, and anxiety. Pérez and colleagues (2008) have also raised concerns about special education placements that move students to separate classrooms, similar to those in English as a Second Language programs, because this placement may lead to isolation from mainstream populations.

For Latino/a students with real special education needs, lack of services may be an equally troubling problem. This is illustrated by Ramírez (2005) who described the case of an immigrant mother determined to have her child evaluated for services. Esperanza, an El Salvadoran immigrant, experienced failed attempts to have her second-grade daughter tested for special education and ESL placement and was told by school administrators that her child should be placed in regular classes to help her learn English. Attempts to address

her daughter's academic deficiencies were met with inaction by teachers and staff. Moreover, appointments were rescheduled without her knowledge, causing a loss of wages on several occasions, and misunderstandings and miscommunication occurred when there were no interpreters at school meetings. Immigrant and low-income parents such as Esperanza often encounter similar barriers as they learn to advocate for their children's education. Esperanza's child did not receive appropriate assessments until she entered the 9th grade, at which point she was far behind academically.

The story of Diego told by Ruiz, Vargas and Beltrán (2002) highlights the complex factors associated with bilingual Latino/a students in general and with special education assessments and placement in particular. Diego arrived as a second grader from Guatemala and was placed in a kindergarten class in East Los Angeles. He completed kindergarten and first grade and was labeled as both "a non-English and a non-Spanish speaker." Although his second grade teacher recognized that he knew more than he was producing academically, Diego did not receive special education referrals until the third grade and was not assessed until fourth grade. An Optimal Learning Environment project worked with bilingual teachers to implement research-based literacy instruction and immersed Diego in interactive literacy routines. After much reassurance from staff, Diego's writing skills began to develop and his confidence increased. He gradually began speaking and became more actively engaged in learning.

Immigrant and Language Issues

The English language learner (ELL) subgroup of the Latino/a student population is part of an impressive demographic shift throughout the United States (Capps, Fix, Murray, Ost, Passel & Herwanto, 2005; Murdock, 2006; Murdock et al., 1997). English language learner youth may be immigrants, migrants, or native-born students. One in five U.S. school-age children are the sons and daughters of immigrants (U.S. Census Bureau, 2001) and 40 percent of foreign-born youths attending school were officially designated as students with limited English proficiency, classified as LEP (Ruiz de Velasco & Fix, 2001). English language learners across the country have endured low academic achievement, poor performance on standardized exams, and a high dropout rate (Vásquez Heilig & López, 2008; Darling-Hammond, 2004a; Gándara et al., 2003; Rumberger & Thomas, 2000; Valenzuela, 1999, 2005). These students often deal with a learning environment characterized by critical shortages of teachers specifically trained to serve them, inadequate instructional materials, low teacher expectations, a lack of cultural sensitivity, and a high-stakes accountability system that leads to a narrowing of curricula (Crawford, 2004; Hampton, 2004; McNeil, 2000a, 2000b; McNeil & Valenzuela, 2001; Valenzuela 1999).

Students with limited English proficiency are nearly twice as likely to live in poverty and tend to be more geographically mobile than their peers (U.S. General Accounting Office, 1994). They are less likely to graduate than the general student population (Rumberger, 2003; Titus, 2007). Geographically mobile students, such as migrants living in poverty and homelessness, experience high rates of absenteeism, thus lagging behind their peers academically (Núñez, 2001). In addition, students who experience high mobility and extreme poverty also experience deficits in health and nutrition and face inadequate study space that limits their ability to learn (Ashabi, 2005; Keogh, Halpenny, & Gilligan, 2006). Furthermore, lack of fluency in English, as well as economic and time constraints, may inhibit parent involvement in their children's schooling (Saenz et al., 2008). These issues may be exacerbated for rural ELL youth (Saenz et al., 2008).

The unique task of mastering academic knowledge and skills while simultaneously acquiring a second language poses a substantial hurdle for ELLs (Baker, 1993). A language student tends to take between 5 to 7 years to acquire native language fluency and the task becomes even more difficult for secondary youth (Cummins, 1981; Thomas & Collier, 1997). These difficulties are compounded for foreign-born immigrant students. As a result, youths from 16 to 19 years of age are significantly more likely to drop out of high school than their U.S.-born peers (Tienda & Mitchell, 2006). At the same time, it should be emphasized that speaking a language other than English is not in itself a handicap. As a matter of fact, in his research Rubén Rumbaut (1995) found that assimilation tends to have negative consequences for immigrants, particularly if it leads to students abandoning their native language and their ethnic ties. In data from over 2,000 8th and 9th grade immigrant students in the San Diego area, Rumbaut found that immigrant students learning English tended to outperform native-born students

who had great facility in English. Being fluent in English, then, is not the solution to all the problems faced by Latino/a students.

Highlighting another problem, in their research, Carola Suárez-Orozco and Marcelo Suárez-Orozco (2001) found that some students in bilingual programs were kept from integrating into mainstream classes so that they could assist newly arrived students. They also reported that students in the ESL and bilingual tracks often have a difficult time switching to college bound tracks and may be overlooked by guidance counselors who work as gatekeepers for college applications and recommendations (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001). Few of the bilingual programs in public schools truly offer bilingual curricula that promote high levels of literacy and cognitive skills in both English and Spanish. The Suárez-Orozco team stated that “the structural barriers of poor, crowded, and violent schools with no meaningful curriculum or pedagogy are for many, especially low status immigrants, simply too much to overcome” (p.152). Thus, the primary predicament for English language learners is not that bilingual education does not work, but rather that most bilingual programs are located in poor, under-resourced schools, and are often staffed by inexperienced teachers with little pedagogical knowledge. While many parents and community leaders have long advocated for bilingual education, at the same time their advocacy should have also focused on high quality education in general, whether in English or Spanish. According to Gándara and Contreras (2009), “In many ways, the controversies and debates over language have distracted the Latino community from the essential inequities they face” (p. 149).

Several programs across the country have begun to serve the unique needs of ELL youth. In California’s San Diego county, approximately 300 students are served each year by *La Clase Mágica* (LCM). LCM has served San Diego County for over 17 years through university, community and organizational partnerships that use a technology-based curriculum for children from the ages of 3 to 18 (Vásquez, 2003, 2006). Rather than viewing cultural and linguistic differences as barriers and “subtracting” participants’ culture and language, LCM aims to create an “additive” learning environment (Valenzuela, 1999) by fostering active learning through positive, adult-peer interaction, and collaborative activities (Vásquez, 2003).

In Texas, the Austin Independent School District reported that approximately one-fifth (21.6%) of its student population (*up from 16.8% in 1999*) falls under the Limited English Proficiency classification (AISD, 2008). LCM is now in the process of establishing itself in Austin, Texas. The Texas Center for Education Policy at the University of Texas at Austin has led an effort, in collaboration with the City of Austin and the Austin Independent School District, to adapt LCM to serve the needs of Austin’s ELL youth.

As researchers, we believe that schools need to incorporate culture and language into the curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices; that they must support caring professionals who have high expectations of students; that they need to recruit a diversified staff and promote anti-racist professional development; that they must eliminate rigid ability tracking; and that they must create and nurture caring relationships with students through pedagogy, counseling, and other curricular and extracurricular activities. In such a school environment, every parent and every student would be valued.

Connecting the Interpersonal, Instructional, and Institutional Contexts

Sonia Nieto

University of Massachusetts—Amherst

Melissa Rivera

Hunter College - City University of New York

Sandra Quiñones

University of Rochester

As discussed throughout this paper, many institutional and instructional strategies can facilitate higher achievement among Latino/a students. Many of these are effective partly because of the relationships they foster. But we also want to point out a few concrete examples of supportive constructive relationships. The common thread in these examples is how the school affirms the students' home cultures and ethnicity. When students witness the validation of their culture within the educational process, they connect their home or community identities with an academic identity. Most importantly, the cultural substance of their identities feeds and sustains an academic *persona*, which in turn promotes strong school-oriented relationships among peers, teachers, and parents. The outcome is engaged and interested students who feel their culture is not a deficit but a benefit to their academic achievement.

These examples demonstrate how student learning is not only a matter of positive interactions between some teachers and their students; institutional arrangements also help create the circumstances and the strategic support that may be available for learning. Conchas (2001, 2006) and Conchas and Rodríguez (2008), for example, have analyzed the connection between particular school programs, or academic groupings, and the variability in Latino/a student engagement and learning. As part of a detailed, comparative case study analysis of different school programs in an urban high school, Conchas (2001) showed how the social organization and routines of different programs, which he refers to as their institutional "subcultures," mediate the nature of students' school engagement, the types of support networks available to them, and their perceptions of and relations with each other, all with implications for their formation (or not), of academic identities, and the effort expended on schoolwork.

The program in which Latino/a students were most successful was less individualistic than others, and it fostered not only a common academic vision and goals, but also positive social relations with teachers and fellow students, instilling the program with a sense of community. Latino/a students in the program experienced close relations with high achieving peers both within and outside of their own ethnic group, thus establishing a peer network, who along with the supportive teachers formed a community of learners to help mediate schoolwork and success.

In contrast to the other high achieving programs, Conchas (2001) points out that this program, which had a medical theme, also helped students assess critically the status quo, reflecting upon the role of race, gender and ethnicity in their schooling and future professions, but without inhibiting their educational and personal achievement. The Latino/a students in this program, Conchas writes, "did not suppress their critical consciousness in favor of academic success"; they "affirmed that they expected to become medical professionals despite the racial, class and gender obstacles they would confront along the way" (p. 49). Hence, the program successfully enacted principles of culturally engaged schooling, acknowledging the ways that race and ethnicity bear on students' lives. It is the nature of the culture of the program as defined by its daily practices, along with academic rigor, strong social relations among students and teachers, and individual sense of agency that offers the institutional support and social capital necessary for academic engagements and success.

The Funds of Knowledge approach (González, 1995; González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005; Moll, González, Amanti, & Neff, 1992; Vélez-Ibáñez & Greenberg, 1992) exemplifies how institutional practices can facilitate the types of interpersonal relationships that account for and privilege students' cultures, thus increasing their

likelihood of academic success. In this approach, teachers learn ethnographic research methods and then visit their students' households to document the cultural practices or "Funds of Knowledge" that families use for everyday survival. Families might share their knowledge about informal economic systems, home-based manufacturing, agriculture, construction, or herbal remedies for illness. Once teachers observe and learn how students and their families "live culturally," they are able to initiate more meaningful relationships with their students. This engagement can facilitate the types of interpersonal relationships that allow students to compensate for discord between their school and community environments. Teachers can also integrate their observations into the curriculum and create lessons that are relevant to students, increasing their academic engagement.

Successful schools often engage students in community-based projects that encourage them to analyze their life circumstances and conditions in their communities, such as poverty, gangs, and housing conditions. They provide familial-like school environments, a safe school, and space in which students are encouraged to affirm their racial and ethnic pride (Antrop-González, 2003). For example, Antrop-González (2003) compiled a review of research on successful small, culturally centered charter schools that have become sanctuaries for students, or a "third space," in urban education. These schools provided meaningful interpersonal relations between students and teachers, community support, and a rigorous curriculum that set high standards of students' achievement (Antrop-González & De Jesús 2006).

Some have suggested alternative school options, such as charter schools or public funding for private school vouchers, as a way to right the problems that Latino/a and African American students encounter in the public school system. A number of prominent Latino/a and African American leaders have supported public funding for private school vouchers or school choice, arguing that low-income students assigned to failing inner-city schools should have the ability to choose schools that can provide successful school environments. Cumulative research suggests, however, that just as with public schools, charter and private schools have the potential to fail urban youth who live in poverty, particularly students of color (Antrop-González, in press).

While many small, community-based schools have been successful in re-engaging students, charter or voucher schools that are not associated with a school district often must charge tuition to compensate for the high cost of educating students. These schools must also be accredited by several federal, state, and local agencies and are sometimes forced to comply with the same accountability standards that create structural barriers for public schools. While alternative schools have potential to offer successful schooling environments that can counter some of the structural barriers found in traditional public schools, they also face additional barriers such as lack of capacity, inconsistency in quality across campuses, and high tuition rates.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Sonia Nieto

University of Massachusetts—Amherst

Melissa Rivera

Hunter College - City University of New York

Sandra Quiñones

University of Rochester

Jason Irizarry

University of Connecticut

As we have seen throughout this paper, the education of Latino/a students is in crisis. At the same time, based on our review of promising practices and creative projects, we also believe that this is a time of great opportunity. There are a number of areas that are especially crucial in improving the education of Latinos/as. Based on our critical synthesis of the literature, in what follows, we briefly address what we see as positive future directions in four broad areas: teacher preparation for diversity, services for ELL and immigrant students, family outreach and community engagement, and school, state, and federal policies and practices.

Teacher Preparation For Diversity

Because of the important role that teachers play in creating culturally responsive environments and learning experiences for students, it is imperative that teacher education and in-service professional development programs develop a vision for improving the preparation of all teachers, and especially those working with students of culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, including Latinos/as. The lack of knowledge and readiness to work with such students is at the heart of the problem. For example, a survey of more than 5,000 teachers concerning their preparedness to teach found that fewer than 34 percent had participated in professional development programs focused on teaching students of diverse cultural backgrounds. Even worse, only 26 percent had any training at all in working with students who are learning English (Parsad, Lewis, & Farris, 2001). Clearly, teachers who do not know their students or the issues they are facing will find it more difficult to connect with them, and to teach them well.

Successful programs at schools and universities ensure that issues of cultural and linguistic diversity are central to teacher learning. Creating appropriate programs entails overhauling the curriculum and field placements in teacher preparation and the nature of in-service education. For example, rather than passive professional development where teachers simply listen to outside experts, it makes more sense to create a climate in which teachers are active co-constructors of their learning. Also, programs in which school districts partner with universities to offer graduate degrees, and where courses are offered onsite at schools, are another model that has been successful. As we have seen in this paper, culturally responsive pedagogy, an anti-racist climate in schools, research in “funds of knowledge” literature and approaches, and both PAR and YPAR have proven to be helpful in familiarizing teachers with appropriate strategies in teaching Latino/a students and in helping to change institutional structures in schools.

Another way in which teacher preparation programs can improve is by focusing on teaching as a vocation based on relationships. Relationships among students and teachers are central to students’ feelings of acceptance and competence. Yet in too many cases, students feel unwelcome and alienated in their schools even to the point that they are reluctant to ask for help from the people who are there to help them. For example, in a recent study, the authors quote a student, Sophia, who said “I wouldn’t ask for help because I didn’t know anyone in the class...and I thought the teacher wouldn’t help me so I just didn’t ask” (Hondo, Gardiner, & Sapien, 2005, p. 112). If students do not even dare ask for help, how can teachers help them learn? Sophia’s words demonstrate

dramatically the need for teacher preparation to focus on promoting relationships as a key element of teaching.

Schools of education and in-service professional development also need to approach teaching as an intellectual endeavor in which teachers view their role in multidimensional ways: as curriculum developers, as researchers of their own practice, and as learners of their students' lives. In this way, teachers also learn to advocate for their students. All of these issues can be included in a quality teacher education program where teachers develop identities as intellectuals and leaders rather than as technicians and test-givers.

Support for English Learner and Immigrant Students

Given the growing number of immigrant and English learners in U. S. schools – the vast majority of whom are Latinos/as – it is imperative that schools offer appropriate support for these students. Unfortunately, in too many cases, newly arrived immigrants and English learners are simply warehoused in special programs (“newcomer” programs or immersion English classes) until they learn sufficient English to be placed in mainstream or general education classes. In the meantime, they lose valuable learning time in other content. In other cases, they are allowed to “sink or swim” by placing them in regular classrooms in hopes that they will soon catch up with their peers. Neither of these is a viable option.

Appropriate programs for immigrant and English learners include English as a Second Language (ESL) and bilingual programs, intensive counseling, and in-school and after-school support services. Bilingual education, as we have seen earlier in this paper, has been successful in both teaching English and content in the native language. The controversies surrounding bilingual education, however, have meant that many bilingual programs have been curtailed, with at least three states (California, Arizona, and Massachusetts) having eliminated them entirely. Yet, according to Patricia Gándara and Frances Contreras (2009),

Many of the problems of cultural mismatch, lack of understanding of students' social and educational circumstances, and inability to communicate with students and parents who do not have a good command of English could be ameliorated if the schools had more well-trained bilingual and bicultural teachers. (p. 107)

A case in point is Massachusetts, where bilingual education was eliminated in 2002 as the result of Question 2, a voter initiative. The following year, students who had previously been in bilingual classrooms were placed in structured English immersion (SEI) classrooms, the thinking being that they would learn sufficient English to be removed to general education classes within a year. A recent comprehensive study of the effect of Question 2 in Boston, however, found mostly negative results of the change. For example, in the years following this policy change, grade retention among English learner high school students in Massachusetts increased from 17.2 to 26.4 percent yearly; in fact, students of limited English proficiency went from being the group with the lowest dropout rate to that with the highest dropout rate in the city. The study also found that achievement gains were “equivocal at best” (Tung et al., 2009, p. 11). That is, although there were some gains, English learners did not improve in their pass scores in the MCAS, the state's mandated high-stakes test, compared with the steady score increases among English proficient students.

Two-way immersion programs in which Latino/a immigrant and ELL students learn in both English and Spanish alongside their English-speaking peers have proven to be a popular alternative supported by both Latino/a families and English-speaking families. In addition, these programs have resulted in high levels of achievement for both English speakers and Spanish speakers. For example, in a longitudinal study by Elizabeth Howard, Donna Christian, and Fred Genesee on two-way immersion Spanish/English programs (2004), the researchers found impressive levels of performance in reading, writing, and oral language in both English and Spanish. Both native English speakers and native Spanish speakers had very high levels of English fluency, and while native English speakers scored lower on reading Spanish than native Spanish speakers, their oral Spanish proficiency was quite high.

In cases where bilingual education is not an option, ELL and immigrant students should be offered ESL instruction by qualified teachers who have received specialized training in the field. What is clear is that English

learners and immigrant students can no longer be ignored or denied the quality education they deserve.

Family Outreach and Community Engagement

Since the NLERAP project began, a central principle underlying our work has been that community engagement and family outreach are necessary for the improvement of the education of Latinos/as. In fact, as we have seen throughout this paper, when families and communities are significantly involved in the education of the youth, great strides can be made. This has certainly been the case where PAR and YPAR approaches are used, but even in more traditional programs, family and community engagement are key factors in improving the education of students. Finding ways to foster communication between the school and Latino/a families is not only an important step in promoting involvement, but is also a proven strategy in raising student achievement.

Traditional family outreach strategies that work with middle-class families will not always work for families living in poverty, families where English is not the primary language, families that feel uncomfortable in the school setting, or families where the parents have not had the privilege of a higher education. Expecting families to help children with homework, while a laudable goal, may not be possible in families where the parents themselves have not had access to a quality education. Another popular approach, “parent education” workshops, can be condescending because they fail to take into account the expertise and experiences that families already have. Having meetings at times when families cannot attend, or in venues that may be difficult to get to, are also not good approaches.

Teachers and administrators need to think more critically and creatively about what it means to involve families in the education of their children. This means taking into account the talents and skills that families possess, and finding more respectful ways to encourage them to become active in their children’s schooling. It also means welcoming other community members and resources into the school, whether individuals, or community organizations. These approaches tend to be much more helpful and successful than assuming that families are not interested in, or committed to, the education of their children.

School, State, and Federal Policies and Practices

Policies and practices at the school, state, and federal levels also need to be addressed if the education of Latino/a students is to be improved. Although limited space does not permit us to address adequately all the policies and practices at each of these levels, in what follows, we focus on several crucial areas.

At the school level, the nature of the curriculum, the pedagogy used by teachers, and the counseling services offered to students have a tremendous impact on the experiences and life chances of Latino/a students. Throughout this paper, we have seen that the curriculum offered in many schools has little to do with the realities of Latino/a students’ lives and experiences. Yet time and again, when the curriculum does include these concerns, students have been both more engaged and more academically successful in school. We are not suggesting that the curriculum should focus *only* on students’ experiences but rather that it must begin with and honor these experiences. At the same time that they build on the knowledge and experiences in their lives and communities, Latino/a students should also be exposed to a wide-ranging curriculum that is expansive and inclusive of the nation and world.

Another vexing and continuing problem is that the traditional curriculum to which Latino/a students are exposed does little to prepare them for postsecondary education. Too often, students reach their final years of high school without having taken some of the courses required to apply to college. By then, it is too late for some. The implications for counseling services are clear. In fact, in all the successful programs we have reviewed, comprehensive counseling services were a key element in developing a sense of belonging in students, as well as in raising their achievement and preparing them for postsecondary education.

Policies at the state and federal levels also need to be reviewed critically. We have certainly seen the results of the contentious debate over bilingual education in several states where it has been eliminated, but even in cases where bilingual education is available, the quality of the programs leaves much to be desired. Simply offering bilingual programs is not enough; also needed are teachers who have been appropriately prepared in

content and pedagogy, adequate resources to run programs well, and administrative and community support to keep them viable.

Testing policies also need revising. Since the early 1980s, the nation has been gripped in the throes of a standardization movement that has done little to improve the education of students but much to improve the bottom line for test publishing companies. In the process, Latino/a student dropout rates have continued to grow, while their college-going rate lags far behind that of other groups. State and federal laws that mandate rigid testing policies need to be overhauled to take into account the unique needs of Latino/a students, and especially students with limited English proficiency. In addition, because the pedagogy in many schools has been severely restricted as a result of rigid testing policies – particularly in schools in poverty-stricken communities – Latino/a students have been especially hard-hit by these policies. The elimination of the arts, physical education and recess, and in some cases even social studies and science, have left Latino/a students with an even more inferior education than before the obsession with standardized testing began.

Final Thoughts

Given the plight faced by Latinos/as not only in our public schools but also in housing, employment, health care, foster care, and other institutions, it is fair to say that schools alone cannot tackle such massive problems because poverty is often at the center of these problems. It is clear, then, that education cannot be separated from the consequences of poverty, and although this paper focuses on education, some caveats are in order.

Poverty is not simply an individual problem. Instead, poverty is created within a particular sociopolitical context characterized by complex structural problems and inequalities. As a result, confronting poverty is a *community and national responsibility*. While schools have historically been expected to bear full responsibility for educating children who live in poverty, this expectation is both unrealistic and myopic. Schools can, of course, do a great deal, but they cannot do it all. In a recent and comprehensive analysis of factors related to poverty that must be addressed if schools are to provide students living in poverty with a quality education, David Berliner (2009) described six out-of-school factors that greatly affect health and learning opportunities of children: (1) low birth weight; (2) inadequate health care; (3) food insecurity; (4) environmental pollutants; (5) family relations and stress; and (6) neighborhood characteristics. Until we take seriously the responsibility to improve these conditions, schooling in and of itself cannot solve achievement problems and inequities.

Larger institutional issues shape children's educational experience, and although solving particular crises in the lives of individual children is an important step in improving educational outcomes for those children, it is not enough to turn the situation around for the vast majority. For example, preschool education is not universally accessible to all families. As a result, young Latinos/as as a group attend preschool at much lower rates than any other group of children in the nation, thus placing them behind their peers even before they begin formal schooling. According to the National Hispanic Leadership Agenda (NHLA 2008), Latino/a children are less likely than their African American and White peers to participate in early childhood education programs. In 2005, 59% of White children participated in center-based preschool education programs, while only 43% of Hispanic children participated. Clearly, universal preschool is one concrete action that cities, states, and the federal government can take to help level the playing field.

Another concrete issue affecting many Latino/a families is homelessness. The stigma associated with foster care, migratory lifestyles, and homelessness influences student disengagement, alienation and non-participation (Keogh, Halpenny, & Gilligan, 2006). One young woman, formerly in foster care, recounted her experiences with homelessness as she attempted college. She described her inability to complete assignments or take an exam and the embarrassment she felt in having to explain her situation to the professor. She stated "...school was so connected to housing, it wasn't funny... I went to the University not looking for sympathy but for them to understand." She further explained, "...okay, now you're going to fail me because now you dropped me a whole letter grade because I didn't turn in one assignment or I didn't take one test... understanding that there's circumstances beyond our control, and I wasn't looking for sympathy but at the same time, I didn't want to tell all my personal business... I'm embarrassed by this" (Perez & Romo, 2009b).

While it is true that larger structural problems such as lack of access to preschool and the growing

problem of homelessness greatly influence student learning, it is also true that schools – and the policymakers, administrators, and teachers who determine what happens in schools – can do a great deal to become places where Latino/a students want to go, where they feel included, and where they can learn successfully. Thus, in spite of the massive structural problems in our society, if we were to address in a consistent and meaningful way such issues as teacher preparation, bilingual and other services for students learning English, and other school, state, and federal policies and practices such as an enriched and multicultural curriculum, culturally responsive pedagogy, consistent counseling, fair and flexible testing policies, and respectful family outreach and involvement, schools would inevitably become spaces of hope and learning.

Although we have focused on students in this essay, our concern here is also the communities from which they come, for this is the crucible of human development that will ultimately sustain the progressive social change we desire. The socioeconomic and cultural development of our communities in our view is ultimately the road to achieving sustainable and ever greater individual academic achievement. School transformation is a critical component of community development. With community development as the long-term goal, reciprocal support between schools and communities is a beneficial result. Although we have emphasized the community-to school direction in this essay because our focus has been an educational one, we also need to explore the interconnectedness of the school and community for mutual support.

In addition, if neighborhoods, communities, and ethnic/racial groups are understood as sociocultural products of history, they should not be ignored but rather engaged by schools. Approaches to educational improvement that espouse market-based reforms ignore this reality because a one-dimensional conceptualization of education results in marginalizing a potentially – and in our view, in the long run, an essentially powerful – alliance. As Latinos/as we also aspire and claim the rights to the benefits and joys of sociocultural continuity and our identities as life-sustaining and enriching. The right to self-determination is not just enhanced, but is based upon, a community's ownership of history and consequently the future, something that democratic societies should encourage and protect. It is clear that if we do not heed the imperative to connect schools and communities in their mutual improvement, we risk failure even with the most well-meaning of intentions and actions.

The education of Latino/a students is at a crucial juncture, not only for Latino/a students for also for our nation as a whole. As we have seen in this paper, the Latino/a community is growing at an unprecedented rate; at the same time, the academic progress of Latinos/as is either at a standstill or regressing. This is bad news not only for Latinos/as but also for the future of our society as a whole. In this paper, we have attempted to demonstrate that there are major institutional and structural barriers that present obstacles beyond the control of students and their families. There are also glimmers of hope and these are evident through the creative programs and approaches we have reviewed, through school environments that nurture students both academically and emotionally, and through the committed and caring educators who make a difference in their students' lives. These glimmers of hope reinforce our conviction that teachers and administrators, Latino/a and other researchers and policymakers, as well as the general public must work collectively to create policies, practices, programs, and school structures that will remove barriers and build upon foundations that promote educational success. Along with policies and practices – and equally crucial – are the personal and collective values and sensibilities among educators and others that insist on educational justice for all students, including Latinos/as.

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AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

Julio Cammarota is an associate professor in Mexican-American Studies at the University of Arizona. His research focuses on participatory action research with Latina/o youth, institutional factors in academic achievement, and liberatory pedagogy.

Chiara Cannella is an assistant professor of Teacher Education at Fort Lewis College. Her research has focused on culturally responsive pedagogy and participatory action research with marginalized youth.

Emmanuel Garcia is the Director of Policy for the Mexican American Legislative Caucus of the Texas House of Representatives. Emmanuel is also a doctoral student in Education Policy and Planning in the College of Education at the University of Texas at Austin. Garcia's research interests include the politics of education policy, legislative behavior and decision-making, school finance, knowledge utilization, and accountability systems.

Jason G. Irizarry is an associate professor of Multicultural Education in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction in the Neag School of Education and Faculty Associate in the Institute of Latina/o, Caribbean, and Latin American Studies at the University of Connecticut. A central focus of his research involves promoting the academic achievement of youth in urban schools by addressing issues associated with teacher education.

Luis C. Moll is Professor in the Language, Reading and Culture Program of the Department of Teaching, Learning and Sociocultural Studies, College of Education, The University of Arizona. His main research interest is the connection among culture, psychology and education, especially as it relates to the education of Latino children in the US.

Sonia Nieto is Professor Emerita of Language, Literacy, and Culture in the School of Education, University of Massachusetts at Amherst. Her research has focused on the education of students of culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, multicultural and bilingual education, and teacher education.

Beatrix Perez is an adjunct professor in the Sociology Department at The University of Texas at San Antonio and also teaches sociology courses at the San Antonio Community College. She has a Masters in Sociology from The University of Texas at San Antonio and has published work on the educational attainment of Latino youth in foster care and poverty and education.

Sandra Quiñones is a visiting assistant professor of Education and a recipient of the Visiting Scholars Award for Diversity and Academic Excellence at the University of Rochester. Her qualitative scholarship focuses on Latina/o education and family-community engagement issues, with an emphasis on bicultural-bilingual elementary teachers' experiences and perspectives around what it means to be a person who is bien educada/o and well educated.

Melissa Rivera is a participatory action research scholar, whose work focuses on an approach to learning and human development rooted in women's/humanistic/somatic psychology, critical/feminist theory and creativity studies, ancient wisdom traditions and social activism.

Harriett Romo is a Professor of Sociology at The University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA) and the Director of the UTSA Mexico Center and the UTSA Child and Adolescent Policy Research Institute. She is co-author of *Latino High School Graduation* (UT Press) and has published articles on Latino immigrant youth and education, transnational families, and Latino education.

Angela Valenzuela is Professor in Education Policy and Planning in the Department of Educational Administration, University of Texas at Austin. Her research and policy interests are in the areas of teacher education, high-stakes testing, school accountability, immigration and education, and urban education. She also serves as director of the National Latino/a Education Research and Policy Project.

Latin@ Students and the School-Prison-Pipeline

Guest Editors: **Lilia Bartolomé** – University of Massachusetts Boston, **Donaldo Macedo** – University of Massachusetts Boston, **Victor Rios** – University of California Santa Barbara, and **Anthony Peguero** – Virginia Tech

It is evident that youth who are disciplined at school can begin a downward path toward academic and social exclusion, educational failure, and economic depression. The conceptualization of the school-to-prison pipeline has emerged from a number of research studies that focused on the effects of the disproportionate punishment of racial and ethnic minority students. Zero-tolerance school discipline policies rose to prominence in the early 1990s, due to the perception that crime in schools was an ever-increasing and unending problem. It is estimated that over three million students are suspended at some point during each school year. This rate is nearly twice the annual number of suspensions that occurred in the 1970s. Although literature on the school-to-prison pipeline has primarily focused on the effect of school discipline, fewer studies have broadened their research scope, especially for a rapidly growing Latina/o youth population.

The consequences of the school-to-prison pipeline are serious for a growing Latina/o youth population. It is argued that the school-to-prison pipeline is an institutionalized mechanism of discrimination that can perpetuate Latina/o inequalities in the US. The school-to-prison pipeline is marginalizing schools, communities, and families by derailing the educational success and progress, restricting and excluding Latina/o youth from the labor market, and promoting the continuation of the historical sense of mistrust and resentment toward authority, the criminal justice system, and all forms of social control. As the United States becomes increasingly immersed in a global competitive market, addressing a school system fraught with inequities, such as the school-to-prison pipeline, becomes imperative. Ensuring and improving educational achievement and attainment of this nation's Latina/o youth is vital for the United States' progress and growth.

We expect this call for papers to continue to build collective knowledge and highlight the various ways that the school-to-prison pipeline, in the broadest understanding, is related to and impacting Latina/o youth. It is also our hope for this issue to provide a forum for scholarship that addresses the urgency of addressing the school-to-prison pipeline for Latina/o youth, families, and the community. We welcome manuscripts that offer theoretical perspectives; research findings; innovative methodologies; pedagogical reflections; and implications associated with the school-to-prison pipeline for Latina/o youth. We propose and solicit more scholarly work on this topic for this theme issue that include but not limited to:

- Parental arrest and incarceration;
- Teacher and administration discrimination;
- Community segregation and marginalization;
- Immigration;
- School resource officers and securitization; and,
- Law enforcement and deportation policies.
- Drop out and/or graduation rates
- Juvenile incarceration

Submissions suitable for publication in this special issue include empirical papers, theoretical/conceptual papers, essays, book reviews, and poems. It is important to note that the special issue is interested in the broader Latina/o experience and not solely focused on the experiences of Mexican Americans (per the title of the journal).

The selection of manuscripts will be conducted as follows:

I. Manuscripts

will be judged on strength and relevance to the theme of the special issue.

2. Manuscripts should not have been previously published in another journal, nor should they be under consideration by another journal at the time of submission.

3. Each manuscript will be subjected to a blind review by a panel of reviewers with expertise in the area treated by the manuscript. Those manuscripts recommended by the panel of experts will then be considered by the AMAE guest editors and editorial board, which will make the final selections.

Manuscripts should be submitted as follows:

I. Submit via

email both a cover letter and copy of the manuscript in Microsoft Word to Victor Rios (vrrios@soc.ucsb.edu).

2. Cover letters should include name, title, short author bio, and institutional affiliation; indicate the type of manuscript submitted and the number of words, including references. Also, please indicate how your manuscript addresses the call for papers.

3. Manuscripts should be no longer than 5000-6000 words (including references). The standard format of the American Psychological Association (APA) should be followed. All illustrations, charts, and graphs should be included within the text. Manuscripts may also be submitted in Spanish.

Deadline for submissions is April 15, 2013. Please address questions to Victor M. Rios (vrrios@soc.ucsb.edu) and Anthony Peguero (anthony.peguero@vt.edu). This special issue is due to be published in December 2013. Consequently, authors will be asked to address revisions to their manuscripts during the summer months of 2013.

Reviewer Form

The following is the rubric to be used for the evaluation of manuscripts considered for the AMAE Journal.

To the Reviewer/Evaluator: please feel free to make embedded changes to the article to improve the quality and/or the delivery of the message. Please do not change the message that the author intended, however. The edited piece will be forwarded to the original author for feedback. The name of the reviewer/evaluator will remain anonymous to the original author.

Reviewer/Evaluator _____ Date _____

Email: _____ Phone: _____

Article Title:

Article addresses the general scope of the Association of Mexican-American Educators Journal	1	2	3	4	5
Timeliness and relevance to current Latino/Mexican-American scholarship and issues	1	2	3	4	5
Theoretical framework/review of the literature is well grounded, focused, and is aligned to the topic/methods of manuscript	1	2	3	4	5
Research methods are clearly articulated and supported with appropriate data to substantiate findings.	1	2	3	4	5
Article is accessible and valuable to researchers and practitioners.	1	2	3	4	5
Clarity, Style, organization and quality of writing	1	2	3	4	5

Overall Score on the Rubric: ____/30

Do you recommend inclusion of this article in the AMAE journal?

Yes, as submitted ☐

Yes, but with minor revisions ☐

Yes, but would need significant revisions and another review ☐

No ☐

Comments/ suggestions to improve the article (for the author):

Comments/ suggestions about the article (for the guest editors) (these comments will not be shared with the author):



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STUDENT: open to full time students in the field of education (18 yrs. +).	\$5		
INSTITUTIONAL: open to institutions (businesses, schools, school districts).	\$500		
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The mission of the Association of Mexican American Educators, Inc. is to insure equal access to a quality education at all levels for the Mexican American/Latino students where cultural and linguistic diversity is recognized and respected. We advise state/local boards and legislators, administrators and faculty and work in partnership with the community and parents for the benefit of our students. We advocate the immediate recruitment, training, retention, support, and professional development of Mexican American/Latino educators and others committed to the education of our students.



