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Edmund T. Hamann

University of Nebraska - Lincoln, ehamann2@unl.edu

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The Local Framing of Latino Educational Policy

Edmund T. Hamann

Edmund “Ted” Hamann (Ph.D, University of Pennsylvania) is a research and evaluation specialist at Education Alliance and an adjunct lecturer at the Center for the Study of Race and Ethnicity in America, both at Brown University. He studies and supports the implementation of comprehensive school reform at the high school level, examines inclusion/exclusion of English language learners from academic programs, and studies how educational policy is changed by its conversion into practice. He is author of The Educational Welcome of Latinos in the New South (Praeger, 2003), co-author of Claiming Opportunities: A Handbook for Improving Education for English Language Learners Through Comprehensive School Reform (The Education Alliance, 2003), and co-editor of the book Education in the New Latino Diaspora (Ablex Press, 2001). He can be e-mailed at Edmund_Hamann@brown.edu.

Abstract

In many parts of the country, Latino newcomers are encountering educational policies that were framed by non-Latino local leaders. This study, an ethnography of educational policy, depicts an unorthodox assemblage of policy framers from both the United States and Mexico who shaped the local education policies aimed at Latino newcomers in Dalton, GA, in the 1990s. The study considers the evolving underlying understandings of these framers and the strategies that resulted, considering also why a temporary consensus that launched an impressive initiative—the Georgia Project—ultimately fractured.

The Local Framing of Latino Educational Policy

Latino educational policy or, more specifically, the educational policies developed to respond to the presence of Latino students in schools often have a substantial local imprint. This has certainly been the case in the “New Latino Diaspora” (Wortham et al. 2001)—those sites in the South, Midwest, and Northwest that have not traditionally hosted Latinos but now find themselves home to growing populations of Latino newcomers. In such sites, where proportions of foreign-born and native Spanish-speaking Latinos are high and locally-born adult Latinos are few, mostly non-Latinos shape the schooling experience of Latino youngsters. Non-Latino teachers, district administrators, and board members decide whether the presence of the newcomers is seen as an opportunity or a problem, whether schools try to be sites of unilateral assimilation or some more pluralistic vision, and whether newcomer parents feel welcome, have access to bilingual interpreters, and/or are expected to have input in how their children’s

schooling is shaped. Local policy makers also decide who is hired and what curricula are used.

Nonetheless, the ways largely non-Latino local education policy makers shape the schooling of Latinos has not been a topic of much study. Derived from Hamann (2003), this article helps fill the current gap, describing local education policy development in Dalton, GA, which in 2001 became the first school district in that state to enroll a majority Latino population, though its Latino enrollment was just 4 percent as recently as 1989. Dalton is also a site that has seen White flight from its schools (See Figure 1).

Dalton, which bills itself as the “Carpet Capital of the World” because of the local concentration of mills, is a specific place, and the change in the demographics of who came to work at its mills in the 1990s (i.e., thousands of Latino—mostly Mexican—newcomers) is a story particular to Dalton and surrounding towns and counties. Yet changes in construction, food-processing, and other industries have prompted similar processes to those depicted here in other locations (Lamphere 1992; Griffith 1995). As recent newspaper reports in the *Atlanta Constitution* and *Charlotte Observer* make clear (Bixler 2003; Bolling 2003; Winston 2003), Dalton is hardly the only community in the South negotiating a linguistic, cultural, and demographic transformation.

Just as demographic changes in Dalton have been akin to those encountered in many other locations, schooling decisions in Dalton precipitated by those changes have occurred in contexts similar to those encountered elsewhere. New students in Dalton have often been Mexican immigrants or children of immigrants, English language learners (ELLs), highly mobile, and from economically vulnerable households. Nationally, each of these labels describes a growing number of students. A recent map in Education Week (Uneven Growth 2000) showed that hundreds of counties across the former Confederacy saw the proportion of Hispanic school-age children grow by at least 75 percent between 1990 and 1998.¹ Nationally, the number of identified ELLs rose 95 percent between 1991-92 and 2001-02 (NCELA 2002). Unfortunately, these labels too often describe students who perform less well and are served less well by schools than are “mainstream” students (see, for example, Rumberger and Larson 1998; Valenzuela 1999; Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco 2001; Valdés 2001). By the mid-1990s it was increasingly apparent in Dalton that a growing number of newcomer students would fare poorly unless their schooling differed substantially from that encountered by similar students elsewhere in the United States.

But then Dalton acted; it started the Georgia Project, an unorthodox binational partnership that linked Dalton schools, the Universidad de Monterrey in Mexico, and several leading Dalton citizens. Within its first year of operation, the Georgia Project coordinated the temporary assignment of bilingual Mexican teachers in Dalton schools, the training of Dalton and other Georgia teachers in Mexico, and the first-ever inventory/needs assessment of Dalton’s rapidly growing Latino community. Since then, the Georgia Project has drawn international attention—its founder has been recognized by the National Association for Bilingual Education and the National Education Association, while Georgia Project partners at the Universidad de Monterrey have accepted the invitation of the Mexican teachers

union to partner in a broad effort to train Mexican teachers to work in U.S. schools (Muñiz 2003). Moreover, the Georgia Project has grown from its original involvement in just Dalton to include several northwest Georgia school districts. Yet as it prospered on many fronts, the Georgia Project in Dalton suffered on others. By 2001, after battles over direct instruction and other issues, the Georgia Project had converted from a three-way partnership to a stand-alone not-for-profit, and the relationship between the project's originators and the original host district had sufficiently foundered, such that the district withdrew almost all involvement with the project. Both the temporary overlap in problem diagnoses that gave rise to the Georgia Project partnership and the growing deviation in those problem diagnoses that ultimately led to its schism shed light on local Latino education policy making and praxis.

The Ethnography of Educational Policy

Meier and Stewart (1991) claim that investigating the interaction between layers of the educational hierarchy provides the key to understanding the politics and prognosis for Latino education. The research design of this study offered such an interstitial vantage point. Crafted as an ethnography of educational policy (Sutton and Levinson 2001, Shore and Wright 1997), its main focus was on the evolving understandings and related recommended policy responses of less than a dozen differently situated crafters of the Georgia Project.

This study shares with Sutton and Levinson (2001) the premise that, at their most rudimentary, all policies are a combination of a problem diagnosis and a strategy of action intended to rectify the problem. As such, policies change as problem diagnoses are refined and/or as strategies are combined, implemented, and assessed. Policies can be explicit and formal, but as practiced they also embed unarticulated problem diagnoses and unexamined habits of action. As Rosen, another important promoter of this perspective has noted,

In the domain of education, when we perceive that children or schools are not performing as we imagine they should, we seek or construct stories to explain why, and to orient our efforts at addressing perceived problems. Education policy is implicated in these myth-making processes: any plan of action, recommendation for change, or statement of goals involves (either explicitly or implicitly) an account of purported conditions and a set of recommendations for addressing them (2001, 299).

The account that follows weaves together data gathered from interviews, observations at meetings, written surveys, newspaper accounts, and "member checking" (that is, the checking of emerging interpretations with those involved to see if there found to be on target or off—[Lincoln and Guba 1985]). The author came to Dalton in 1997 with two explicit identities: (1) as a researcher carrying out fieldwork for a dissertation and (2) as a grantwriter. For the latter, he helped the Dalton schools leverage \$500,000 by leading the drafting of a Title VII system-wide bilingual education grant that the district insisted it wanted to support the nascent

Georgia Project. For the former, he documented the actions and arguments of a number of key individuals—none of whom, it must be emphasized, acted maliciously. One can agree or disagree with the decisions made by various individuals depicted and the premises they acted upon, but part of what is important about this account is that it sheds light on how real people, faced with partial knowledge and not always consistent understandings of what should be, shaped educational policies that affected thousands of Latino students.

Getting to March 1997: Crafting a Policy to Respond to Latino Newcomers

The individuals who first crafted and guided the Georgia Project were policy makers, though not all were in positions that one would normally associate with educational policy making. They embedded the Georgia Project with particular beliefs about the constituencies they were addressing, the struggles the community faced, the needs their program should attend to, and the strategies that could be pursued. Those who were Georgia-certified educators also assured that state policy parameters (e.g., the fact that Georgia only permits standardized testing of students in English) and those policies' underlying assumptions were part of the calculation of local policy and practice.

Among the key crafters of the Georgia Project were an attorney who had previously served in the U.S. Congress and Georgia Senate, a new superintendent who came to Dalton in 1996 from a superintendency in south Georgia that included only two ELLs among its 8,000-plus students, a veteran district administrator (here called the curriculum coordinator) who was one of the Georgia Project's key early champions and then its earliest important skeptic, and a sociologist from the Universidad de Monterrey who collaborated with a changing rotation of four other Monterrey-based important project partners. A local carpet executive, a Mexican businessman, a state education administrator, a principal who piloted many of the ideas that the Georgia Project tried to scale up at her Dalton elementary school, and the author of this article also played notable smaller roles.

In 1993, when Dalton's daily newspaper ran a feature story with the subtitle "Schools Key to Assimilating Hispanics" (Hoffman 1993), there was no Georgia Project. In the article, school leaders were quoted as saying that limited English proficient immigrant students needed from one year up to three years to learn adequate English to be successfully mainstreamed (a claim contrary to most second-language acquisition research, e.g., Cummins 1981; Collier 1987, 1995; Hakuta et al. 2000; Mitchell et al. 1997; Thomas and Collier 2001). The extra challenges such students encountered at school were reduced to issues of language difference. In the article, "Hispanic" families were distinguished from "American" families in a simplistic and exclusionary way of noting cultural difference. At that time, the small but expanding English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) program was the district's only major curricular accommodation to the newcomers. The community response around then was mostly passive, but included opening a local INS office, raids at local plants (Rehynsky 1995a, 1995b), and

enough bitter letters to the editor in the local newspaper that there was a temporary moratorium on letters about newcomers.

As the Georgia Project was getting started, Dalton schools' longtime record of high quality still seemed to be intact, at least as measured by the district's average SAT scores, which were frequently cited. The 1997 average was Georgia's second highest and well ahead of the national average (Georgia Department of Education 1998). The high SAT average was a misleading indicator of district quality and health, however, because graduation data—particularly Hispanic graduation data—suggested a sizable portion of Dalton's potential SAT-taking population was not taking the test because they were not staying in school. According to district data, in September 1996, the Hispanic proportion of the ninth-grade enrollment was 30.5 percent (113 out of 371) and 10th grade 30.0 percent (82 out of 273), but 11th grade was only 17.3 percent (46 out of 266) and 12th grade 11.8 percent (27 out of 229). Those 11th and 12th grades would have been the SAT-takers that generated the scores previously noted.

As the enrollment data hint, all was not well with schooling in Dalton in the mid-1990s, of which teachers, paraprofessionals, and administrators were all increasingly aware. Just before the end of the 1995-96 school year, an Anglo attorney and some colleagues responded to a tearful invitation by the attorney's daughter to observe classes at the elementary school where the attorney's daughter was a paraprofessional. According to the daughter, the educators at this school (practically all monolingual English speakers) were struggling to understand their rapidly growing numbers of Spanish-speaking students and parents. During the visit, a frustrated teacher complained that she was about to pass Hispanic students on to the next grade level, even though she thought they were only just ready to begin the grade level they were officially finishing. Whether the teacher intended her comment to generate any reaction beyond sympathy quickly did not matter; that conversation and others like it between the attorney and her colleagues were precipitous. The attorney determined the school district should be confronted and its plans for educating Latino newcomers made clear.

He quickly arranged meetings with district leaders to ask how the district was responding to the influx of Latinos. The retiring superintendent said there was no district-wide plan but added that the district was open to suggestions. Hardly pausing, the attorney set out to generate some recommendations. Working openly with the school system but according to his own dictates, he contacted a client who was a longtime family friend and the wealthy CEO of one of Dalton's large carpet manufacturers. The CEO agreed to pursue a NAFTA-related business link in Mexico on behalf of the emergent project. The CEO called a Mexican business partner asking that partner how Dalton could be assisted in its efforts to accommodate its influx of Mexicans. The Mexican business leader then contacted the rector of the Universidad de Monterrey to discuss creating a partnership between Dalton schools and the university. Though the Mexican business leader had no official affiliation with the university, his grandfather had played an instrumental role in the founding and the development of the Universidad de Monterrey, and several executives in the corporation he headed were university trustees. Though what was being proposed was pretty nebulous, the rector asked one of his sociology

professors if he would be willing to head up a collaborative project in Georgia. Making the whole proposition seem slightly more real, in September 1996 the Dalton attorney called the designated professor in Monterrey.

With evidence that one of Dalton's most important business leaders was on board, in September the attorney also successfully petitioned Dalton's new superintendent to draft a letter in support of the nascent project that would clarify some of the district's wishes and needs. The letter marked the first substantive direct communication between Dalton schools and the Universidad de Monterrey and was disproportionately important for the shaping of Monterrey leaders' conceptualizations of the school district's wishes, understandings, and expectations. The superintendent wrote that he had queried the principals at each of Dalton's eight schools, and they had expressed interest in 68 bilingual teachers. He also wrote that district leaders were committed to long-term bilingual education and claimed the district's sought to provide first-language support to native Spanish-speakers in various academic content areas with the goal of literate, bilingual graduates. The letter did not indicate that the superintendent's understanding regarding bilingual education, or education of ELLs more generally, only was rudimentary, nor that he and his colleagues were less disposed to fight for it than they appeared.

The first meeting between Dalton and Mexican university officials was 12 December 1996 (the holiday for the Virgin of Guadalupe) at the Universidad de Monterrey. Present from Dalton were the chair of Dalton's school board, the attorney, the new superintendent, the curriculum coordinator, and a principal who had recently written a dissertation on the professional development needs at schools that were newly enrolling large numbers of ELLs.

Though Dalton leaders and the attorney had sufficient hopes for the partnership to go to Monterrey, Universidad de Monterrey participants recalled that the only solid item on the Dalton side's agenda was to ask for the Universidad de Monterrey's help bringing bilingual teachers to Dalton.² (Efforts by another Dalton district administrator to recruit bilingual teachers domestically at the National Association for Bilingual Education annual meeting, for example, had previously attracted few.) The Monterrey leaders felt Dalton's one-dimensional proposal, on its own, was not something they were particularly interested in. After humorously offering to place a help-wanted ad in a Monterrey newspaper if it was just recruiting assistance that Dalton was seeking, they offered to help Dalton find bilingual instructors provided the school district and attorney would also welcome three additional components for the project—training in Mexico for Georgia teachers, development of a bilingual curriculum, and an ambitious but loosely defined community initiative that included needs assessments, workplace literacy initiatives, and identification and organization of local Latino leaders. Dalton project partners accepted this more encompassing design. The day the Dalton delegation left for Monterrey, the local paper on the front page told the attorney's story about how his daughter's frustration with language barriers impeding the learning environment at a Dalton elementary school had led to the project (Hamilton 1996).

In January 1997, the first visit was reciprocated when the Dalton carpet CEO's corporate jet was used to bring a team from Monterrey to Dalton. That visit, which included stops at local carpet mills (where hundreds of Mexican newcom-

ers now worked), visits to local schools, and meetings with leading business figures, was a chance for the Monterrey leaders to refine plans for the four components and for Dalton leaders to generate publicity and momentum.

It was also an occasion for project proponents to encourage the local newspaper to print stories about the initiative and the problem diagnoses and strategic responses it embedded. Headlines corresponding with this visit to Dalton included: “Communication Revolution Arrives in Dalton Today” (Hamilton 1997a), “Visiting Professors Shocked by Size of Communication Problem” (Hamilton 1997b), and “Business Involvement Aids Georgia Project” (Daily Citizen-News 1997a). Reiterating ideas that Hispanic students and Anglo teachers in Dalton faced a communication gap and that the Georgia Project would bridge that gap, thus resolving Hispanic students’ problems, the “Visiting Professors Shocked” story described a lengthy conversation (presumably in Spanish) between one of the Monterrey visitors and a young Hispanic student. The student’s teacher claimed shock at the exchange because she had never seen the girl particularly expressive; in fact, the teacher had worried that the girl had a speech or learning problem. The article’s intended conclusions were easy to draw: If only somebody could communicate with these newcomer students, the students’ general talents could be displayed and cultivated.

Policy in Practice: The Hazy Consensus Fractures and Latino Education Policy Changes

To the extent that mobilization of the local business community and the local paper’s favorable coverage are proof, the Georgia Project was already becoming a successful four-component Latino education policy in the winter of 1997. Some key obstacles remained, however, including finding the resources to launch those programs. Much of the winter and spring was devoted to this, with a signing ceremony at Dalton High School formalizing the partnership as a mid-March highlight.

Three strategies were pursued to obtain resources. Following the lead of the CEO who had lent his plane to bring the Monterrey visitors to Dalton in January, several other carpet industry leaders made substantive financial and in-kind pledges. Second, the attorney lobbied the city council to set aside a portion of an unexpected \$12 million windfall to support the project. Third, the district determined to seek a federal Title VII system-wide bilingual education grant. Each of these required articulation, of greater or lesser detail, about what the resources were intended for, and that articulation became a further occasion for refining policy.

The local carpet executives appeared mostly satisfied with the description of the project to that point, asking only for a further clarification of what the community and workplace initiative was to entail. That winter one carpet executive rented an apartment (that visa problems kept from being used) to house visiting teachers from Mexico. He also donated more than a dozen frequent flier vouchers to help Dalton teachers participate in a summer 1997 training in Monterrey. Ironically,

this support proved exceptional. In the late '90s several of the project's earliest champions literally sold their businesses and left Dalton as the industry consolidated.

The attorney's entrees with the city council bore more fruit. In April, the Dalton City Council committed \$250,000 a year for each of the next three years to the Georgia Project. But these first substantial resources came with an unexpected cost. According to the local paper's editorial (Daily Citizen-News 1997b) published two days after the public funds for the Georgia Project had been approved, there had been a demonstration against Georgia Project funding outside of the city council meeting. Using the Georgia Project as a new excuse for protesting the presence of immigrants in Dalton, one of the demonstrators asked, "Will the last person to leave Whitfield County please take the American flag with them?" Though the comment was illogical and dismissed by the editorial writers as racist fear, in the same editorial the writers offered a different and much narrower rationale for the Georgia Project than those that had circulated before: "Again, the goal of the Georgia Project is teaching English. There may be reasonable arguments against the Georgia Project. Maybe it costs too much money, or maybe there are simpler ways to teach English to these students" (4A). The newspaper's perspective opened the door for criticizing any part of the Georgia Project that was not oriented toward English-language acquisition. Still, \$750,000 was in hand for three years of work.

The quest for Title VII funds originated with the advice of an administrator in another district to Dalton's curriculum coordinator, who began drafting the Title VII system-wide bilingual education proposal in mid-February. On 27 February, she faxed to the Georgia Department of Education's coordinator of ESOL and migrant education programs (who also oversaw Title VII) a six-page draft that included references to Thomas and Collier's bilingual education research, a declaration that English immersion was inadequate, and a claim that Dalton students in its single two-way immersion classroom were achieving at a higher level than their peers. This state administrator had communicated with the Georgia Project's instigating attorney and had worked with ESOL teachers in the district, so she was aware of Dalton's demographic changes and the nascent Georgia Project. In her comments on the Dalton coordinator's draft, she scribbled, "Add GA Project." She also suggested that the Dalton administrator seek assistance with the drafting. This led to your author being hired. His instructions from the district were explicit: obtain funding for the Georgia Project. The submitted proposal dutifully described the four intended components and promised other tie-ins to several existing district initiatives.

Mid-drafting, the Dalton curriculum coordinator asked that the proposal seek support for direct instruction—a fully scripted, phonics curriculum (Adams and Engelmann 1996) that, as Goode (2002) points out, made no claim about being effective with second-language learners. The submitted draft, however, included just one passing reference to direct instruction, as direct instruction's lack of apparent acknowledgment or use of non-native speakers' first-language skills seemed inconsistent with the federal request for proposal. In the summer word came that \$500,000 of Title VII funding would be directed to Dalton.

In June 1997, the Georgia Project began converting from being a plan to being a series of loosely coordinated actions. A team of scholars from Monterrey began a rapid assessment of the local Latino community. That effort, in turn, led to the publication later that year of a report that included the first public sphere articulations by Latino parents, not all of whom were happy with their children's Dalton school experiences. The report also identified a cadre of incipient Latino leaders (successful entrepreneurs, organizers of soccer leagues, and the like) who were invited to a November training in Dalton led entirely by staff from Monterrey on community organizing. That group later formed Dalton's first Latino-organized community organization.

In June also, a team of Dalton and Whitfield County educators (Whitfield County surrounds Dalton) traveled to Monterrey for an intensive four-week training in Spanish, curriculum development, Mexican history, and other topics related to improving schooling for Dalton's new Latino students. At the elementary school that sent 10 of Dalton's 17 participants, the training had a cathartic effect during the 1997-98 school year, adding classroom materials and improving communication with many students and parents.

Finally, during the summer of 1997 Dalton stopped trying to unilaterally break the logjam keeping prospective bilingual instructors from Mexico from obtaining visas. It hired an immigration attorney who succeeded at arranging for a first team of 14 to come to Dalton in October 1997. When those instructors, all young women, arrived, they immediately became the most public and prominent face of the Georgia Project. All were trained and certified bilingual educators, yet because their Mexican credential was not recognized in Georgia, all officially served as paraprofessionals, supervised by Dalton teachers. Acknowledging their more advanced training, they were provided free housing and transportation.

The original idea had been to have the visiting instructors support implementation of the fourth component, the bilingual curriculum, but that was not ready (and never would be, as the district unilaterally discarded the idea), so their tasks instead were improvised and varied substantially school by school. Both the paraprofessional status and the absence of a coherent plan for their use emerged as important problems. Nonetheless their contributions were heralded by all of the Georgia Project initiators, even as those initiators' consensus started to fracture.

On 27 March 1998, with a "coming out party" initiated by the attorney, the project reached an apex in Dalton. Thereafter, the Georgia Project would receive national accolade, obtain substantial additional resources, and begin exciting collaborations with other districts, but never again would the Dalton school district prove as willing and proud a partner. Almost 70 education and business leaders attended the event, many coming from Atlanta. They saw children at a school for pre-kindergarten to grade two sing for the guests in English, Spanish, and American Sign Language and then saw Monterrey and Dalton teachers collaborate in their classrooms. At the high school, attendees saw other Monterrey instructors, and some noticed signs on the wall, in Spanish, encouraging votes for a Latino student's bid for student council president. The attendees then were hosted for lunch in the corporate dining room of Dalton's largest carpet manufacturer, where the attorney delightedly announced that his daughter—the one who had voiced the

original precipitous complaint—had that morning been back for the first time in two years to the elementary school she had previously worked at, only to be amazed at how much more inclusive it had become.

Visitors also saw visiting instructors using the direct instruction curriculum. That activity did not appear to draw any negative comment, but it could have. Direct instruction was a strange thing to have trained bilingual educators from Mexico implementing. Not only were their modelings of pronunciation heavily accented (which is only really a problem if one is trying to teach standard phonetic forms), the full scripting of the curriculum meant that technically the visiting instructors were not to use either their native language capacities nor their knowledge of Mexican culture and educational systems as tools to assist their students' comprehension. Non-district-based partners increasingly questioned this usage, publicly and privately.

During the 1998-99 school year, the attorney joined in the emerging stand-off between the Georgia Project and direct instruction. When he learned that Title VII funds were being used to pay for high-cost direct instruction training, he publicly questioned this use of the funds (in the process breaking a 100-year-old precedent of public mutual praise between the school system and community leaders) and demanded an audit of all of the district's Georgia Project-related expenditures. He accurately claimed that the Title VII proposal had sought funds for the Georgia Project, not direct instruction. But the district countered that the U.S. Department of Education had agreed to the way they expended the Title VII funds. The ambiguous but friendly collaborative governance of the Georgia Project, with the attorney's team on one side and the district on the other—an arrangement that had led Monterrey-based collaborators to comment, "We were never sure who to send the fax to"—had become quarrelsome.

This led to small antagonistic gestures and larger ones. As two examples of the former, Dalton formally denied further interest in a Georgia Project bilingual curriculum development component (a project which they had never aggressively welcomed), and the superintendent's assistant turned over to the attorney the checkbook that had been used to authorize doubly signed expenditures of the city council's contribution to the project. More substantively, and perhaps with an eye to the growing cost of direct instruction and continued criticism of it (much of which had little to do with the Georgia Project), the district moved to curtail the project's signature visiting instructor initiative. This effort led to a public showdown at a June 1999 school board meeting, in which the superintendent's bid to curtail the initiative met an unprecedented rebuke by the board after members who the superintendent thought supported his position opted not to. (No one could remember a superintendent's recommendation being publicly rejected by the school board before; prior practice had all disagreements privately rectified before the public performance of a board meeting.)

Dalton's Georgia Project visiting instructor program was saved at that 1999 board meeting, but only temporarily and without a resolution of the complaint about the visiting instructors being used to teach direct instruction. In 2000, the superintendent who had come to Dalton in 1996 opted to retire, and his successor refused to have the district continue carrying the costs of providing the visiting

instructors with free housing and transportation. In turn, the Universidad de Monterrey announced that under those conditions it would no longer provide visiting instructors to Dalton. (Ironically, this same new superintendent also started dismantling the expensive direct instruction program that had not, as promised, improved test scores.) Of the original four components, only the summer training institute continued to involve Dalton.³

Implications for Understanding Latino Educational Policy

The previous paragraphs of the Georgia Project implementation story in Dalton may read like a soap opera, but while clearly bared emotions and personal and professional frustrations are part of the story, such a reading misses a far more serious point. The education policy crafted for Latinos was vulnerable to change and revision not just because of a contest of pedagogical ideas (which led to the initial disagreements), but because Latino education policy can ultimately be derailed/transformed by factors that have little to do with Latino education. Instead of the dominant question remaining—what would best serve newcomers?—questions or arguments about the prerogatives of superintendents, district administrators, community leaders, and scholars from a Mexican university to craft policy prevailed.

The Georgia Project was initiated with a hazy consensus that nothing was happening and that something needed to happen to help the schools and larger community negotiate their rapid demographic change. Bilingual education seemed like a good idea until it was more closely considered, and then some withheld their favor for it. The premise of informal shared management of the Georgia Project also seemed wise until contests for authority revealed its weakness. The superficiality of the original consensus became apparent.

To district administrators in a culturally conservative part of the country, it stopped being easy to stay loyal to a program beyond their ken of expertise, championed mainly by a local attorney and Mexican university personnel. The passage of California's Proposition 227 initiative suddenly called into public question (not scholarly question) the premises of bilingual education. In turn, alternatives like direct instruction, which claimed a grounded research base and a solid record of achievement and, to boot, reiterated the prerogative of administrators and not outsiders to select and develop policy, sounded like a preferable option. The emotional tit-for-tat of the project implementation further disposed district personnel to find rationales for distancing themselves from what they did not control.

So Dalton stayed with direct instruction (at least for a while) and moved away from involvement in the Georgia Project. In turn, the attorney, the small professional staff he assembled, and the partners from Monterrey devoted their attention to more receptive districts. One of those districts—Whitfield County—soon helped its Latino students become the highest-scoring Latinos (on average) of all the Georgia districts with significant Latino enrollments (i.e., first out of approximately 40). Dalton's score outcomes were not as favorable, but district personnel were increasingly proud of a new newcomer school (that new arrivals attended for

up to a year) and other steps they had taken “after” the Georgia Project. Dalton personnel who had previously been involved in the crafting of the Georgia Project insisted that the project had been a useful intermediate phase for the district and that they subsequently were doing something better. Perhaps they were right. That is an issue for a future study that can also consider how well-intended, savvy, but still partially informed non-Latino local policy makers understand what Latino students need and should receive. That is how local educational policy for Latinos is being shaped, at least in Dalton.

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Endnotes

¹ Only Mississippi, Louisiana, and Texas did not substantially follow this trend. In the case of Texas this was because a large existing Latino population base meant that the proportional growth between 1990 and 1998 was smaller, though actual growth was substantial. In contrast, Mississippi's and Louisiana's economies were less robust and generated less growth and fewer new jobs.

² Three years after this meeting, the attorney's recollection of the rationale for the Georgia Project supported the interpretation that importation of bilingual and bicultural teachers was the Dalton initiator's primary goal: "We decided we needed instructors who were of the same ethnic origin as the bulk of the students, who were wise in the culture and bilingual. That's a very simple proposition. Now, how do we find them?" (Wexler 1999).

³ A negative reaction to a draft workplace literacy report had led Monterrey to refrain from generating the additional reports promised as part of the community initiative, an action that other partners did not protest.

Figure 1.
Dalton Enrollments by Race/Ethnicity (1989-2001)

