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Antonia Darder

Loyola Marymount University, [antonia.darder@lmu.edu](mailto:antonia.darder@lmu.edu)

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## Latinos, Education, and the Church: Toward a Culturally Democratic Future

Antonia Darder  
Loyola Marymount University

*The article provides a comprehensive critical analysis of key issues that are deeply salient to an examination of the relationship of Latinos, education, and the Church. The status of Latinos and their educational participation in the US is systematically presented through a critical theoretical lens that brings questions of historical, political, and economic inequalities and their consequences to the center of this interpretive interrogation. With this foundational piece in place, the article moves to the concept of cultural democracy as an important philosophical principle in our work to transform the education of Latino children within Catholic schools and beyond. The role and responsibility of the Church is linked here to proclamations offered by Pope Francis toward revolutionizing the labor of the Catholic Church and Catholic education in an effort to more effectively engage with the pedagogical needs of Latino communities. Moreover, the discussion employs a much needed critical philosophical lens that defies the presentation of recipes or prescriptions for how emancipatory education will look when achieved, but rather invites Catholic educators, scholars, and the leadership of the Church into deeper reflection and consideration of the culturally democratic dimension that must be integrated into Catholic social teaching, if we are to genuinely achieve the necessary structural changes required to ensure educational justice for all Latino students.*

### Keywords

Latinos, critical analysis, cultural democracy, emancipatory education, Catholic social teaching

*School broadens not only your intellectual dimensions, but also the human one... School can and should function as a catalyst, being a place of encounter and convergence of the entire educational community with the single objective of shaping and helping [students] to grow as mature, simple, honest, and competent persons who know how to love faithfully, who know how to live their lives as a response to God's call and their future professions as a service to society.*

—Pope Francis<sup>1</sup>

Pope Francis's powerful words about the function of schooling coincide well with the ideas of the late Brazilian education philosopher Paulo Freire, in their underlying intent to inspire societies toward a more loving and humanizing educational purpose. Freire insisted that our historical vocation as subjects of history and, thus, by extension the purpose of schooling, should be that "of becoming more fully human" (Freire, 1971, p. 84). This points to salient issues that must be at the forefront of our consciousness, as we move to examine the role of Catholic educators in supporting Latino students across all communities and educational settings. To do so, however means a careful rethinking of the Church's vision for education today beyond solely Catholic school formation and Church affiliation.<sup>2</sup> Instead, there is a need for greater critical engagement with the lives of Latino children and their families, within the everyday places where we struggle to survive and make a place for ourselves, in these times of change and great uncertainty. This requires that the labor of Catholic educators engage with the historical, social, and material conditions that shape the lives of Latino communities in the U.S. today. With this, there must be a decisive recognition that the education of Latino students matters and that there is serious urgency for proactive responses by the Church on this question.

Similarly, this raises the need for more deliberate engagement within future practices of Catholic educators, in ways that can play important public pedagogical roles, particularly with respect to the need of the most impoverished Latino communities. This to highlight that a renewed Catholic vision

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1 (Vatican Information Service, 2013)

2 The US Council of Catholic Bishops' writing on Catholic education provides some thoughtful discussions on Church school formation and Church affiliation. See: <http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/how-we-teach/catholic-education/>

of emancipatory education could potentially help lead the larger society toward establishing more humanizing structures and practices of formal and informal learning, which can in turn support the development of social consciousness, democratic voice, and community participation in the daily culture of neighborhood churches and schools—a process that is necessary to reinventing a more just world.

However, any humanizing vision for democratic education and the transformation of social inequalities will be, indeed, fully contingent on educational priorities, ethical concerns, and curricular approaches that fundamentally impact the social and intellectual formation of Latino students. Inherent to this process must be emancipatory values of community that can sustain a universal understanding of human kinship and solidarity, within and across cultural communities. However, it should be noted that relying solely on a liberal universal human rights notion of human existence as a primary philosophical foundation for diversity practice within churches, schools, and communities is insufficient to meeting the educational needs of working-class Latino students. Traditional mainstream efforts to conflate cultural differences and erase or revise histories of genocide, slavery, and colonization have often been carried out in the name of universality. This has led to an overarching tendency to deny the destructive and persistent impact of racializing and economically induced historical violence upon oppressed Latino populations. Basic to the politics and practices of racialization, impoverishment, and social exclusion, U.S. schooling and other social institutions have perpetuated deficit discourses that reinforce the angst and frustration of Latino populations—populations that historically have looked to the Church for respite from inequality, seeking a more just vision and greater acceptance of cultural difference.

Yet, just as poverty and institutional racism have remained pervasively embedded in contemporary life, so too has the Church perpetuated a hidden curriculum of assimilation, reinforcing structures of inequality and social exclusion, whether by deliberate design, unfortunate ignorance, or dire neglect. This debilitating phenomenon has often led to conditions that have failed to address cultural differences, within and outside the Church, while professing to bestow generosity onto impoverished and racialized communities. This is particularly the case with Latino immigrant populations, the majority of whom profess to be Catholic and, as such, today provide the U.S. Church with a lion's share of its newest and most devout congregants.

If the future work of Catholic educators in the United States is to evolve in ways that can contend seriously with the educational needs of Latino communities, then it will require that the societal forces that reverberate harshly in the hardships faced by Latinos and Latinas become part-and-parcel of a larger ecumenical dialogue for the future. This is essential to the contribution of our labor in Latino communities, given that the status of education in our communities is in crisis. Moreover, we must acknowledge this educational crisis as a human rights issue—one that requires closer interrogation of the social dilemmas and contradictions it poses for any institution publicly committed to the dignity and well-being of the most vulnerable populations.

### The Status of Latino Education

*A change of attitude towards [Latinos]<sup>3</sup> is needed on the part of everyone, moving away from attitudes of defensiveness and fear, indifference and marginalization – all typical of throwaway culture – towards attitudes based on a culture of encounter, the only culture capable of building a better, more just and fraternal world.*

—Pope Francis<sup>4</sup>

Educators across the country continue to grapple with the failure of mainstream education to meet the needs of Latino students, especially of Latino immigrant students. In the last two decades, a variety of federal and state policy initiatives have supported culturally assimilative and linguistically restrictive educational policies. As a consequence, the right to bilingual education for language minority students was abolished, while practices tied to federal mandates of *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) and *Race to the Top* (RTTT) reinforced high-stakes testing, standardization of the curriculum, and the privatization of education. In Arizona, mean-spirited policy initiatives against Chicanos and Mexican immigrants encompassed nativist efforts to restrict the use of Spanish in schools and the workplace, the elimination of Mexican American studies at the secondary level, and the banning of books

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3 “Latinos” is inserted here in the place of “migrants and refugees,” in that many of the issues faced by impoverished Latino communities in the US. echoes concerns expressed by the Pope in this message. This is true for Latino immigrant populations, which now comprise an increasingly larger sector of the U.S. Catholic Church.

4 (Francis, 2013b)

considered to be subversive by conservative proponents of curricular and textbook reforms (Aguirre, 2012; Darder, 2012).

Yet, despite the repressive intent of such policies, demographers across the nation are forecasting that by 2050, populations of color will be the majority in the U.S. and Latinos will comprise the largest of these populations (Krogstad, 2014; Passel & Cohn, 2008).<sup>5</sup> In fact, according to statistics released in July 2015, Latinos already outnumber Whites in California (Panzar, 2015). Hence, these changing demographics are a factor that all U.S. institutions, including the Church and Catholic education must consider seriously with respect to future planning, if they are to remain relevant and effective to an increasingly Latino populace.

### **Latino Demographics**

According to the most recent U.S. Census data, the Latino population today is nearly 52 million and the largest and youngest ethnic minority population in the United States. The Mexican-origin population is estimated to comprise 67% of the total Latino population. Moreover, 1 in 5 schoolchildren and 1 in 4 newborns are Latino. Never before in the nation's history has an ethnic minority group made up so large a share of the youngest population; numbers expected to triple in the next three decades (Passel & Cohn, 2008). By 2036, Latino children are projected to comprise one-third of all children, ages 3 to 17 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008). Among the 30 million young people, ages 18 to 24, living in the U.S. today, six million (20%) are Latino youth. By the sheer force of numbers, the education that Latino students undergo will dramatically shape both the future of the Church and the history of this nation.

It is against the backdrop of intense national debate about the looming specter of the "browning of America," that we must work to grapple with the impact of demographic change. The subject of Latinos as a growing diaspora has also gained considerable attention in policy circles and theoretical discussions. Projections by the Pew Hispanic Center<sup>6</sup> showed that 82% of

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5 Although earlier projections for 2050 forecasted even more robust growth in the Latino population, projections in the last year indicate that, although the Latino population is expected to double to about 106 million, this is nearly 30 million lower than earlier projections published by the Census Bureau.

6 Founded in 2001, the Pew Hispanic Center is a nonpartisan research organization that seeks to improve understanding of the U.S. Hispanic population and to chronicle Latinos' growing impact on the nation. See: <http://www.pewhispanic.org/>

the future Latino population increase will be due to immigrants from Latin America, with the majority being their U.S.-born descendants (Taylor, Gonzalez-Barrera, Passel, & Lopez, 2012). Currently, 93% of all Latinos living in the US are under the age of 18 and born in this country. The trends in population shifts also show a declining White population, while there has been a steady Latino population increase in the last three decades. It is also worth noting, as the percentage of the White population decreases in number—for they will still hold the majority of national wealth, power, and privilege—new waves of political suppression may arise. In fact, the last decade of political turmoil in Arizona, including the passage of Proposition 200 in 2004 that introduced a voter ID Law as an explicit attempt at political suppression (Deutsch, 2011), may be a bellweather of future backlash, as the White population loses the security of its former majority status.

Moreover, given rising Latino immigration to the US, it is important to note that our well-being is also tied to the well-being of workers in the Caribbean, Mexico, and Latin America. Many of the difficult economic conditions and political ramification faced by Latino workers in their countries of origin—many that were historically provoked by U.S. economic policies and targeted investments—have served as a catalyst for Latino immigration. Ana Maria Pineda, R.S.M. (2005) reflects on this phenomenon:

The colonization of the Americas by Spain has negatively marked the history of Latinos/ Hispanics in the United States. We continue to live out the consequences of a history of conquest and colonization. Five hundred years later, the lives of the Hispanic community has not greatly improved. This is true of the Latino reality on both sides of the border. What is experienced in Latin America is shared in similar ways by the Hispanic/Latino community in the United States. The constant migration of Latinos from south and north of the U.S. border makes this a local and global reality for Sisters of Mercy. The Catholic Church has not given this migrant group the pastoral attention it needs. (p. 15)

Similarly, commonplace practices of U.S. labor exploitation have stirred the undocumented movement of workers across the U.S./Mexico border. However, although demographically more significant today, the political economy of the border has been a longstanding phenomenon, one that historically also prompted Puerto Rican, Dominican, and other Latin American workers to trek north for better paying jobs and to secure a more promising educational future for their children.

## Latino Enrollment and Graduation Rates

In the nation's schools, Latino students have today reached a new milestone. For the first time, 1 in 4 (24.7%) public elementary school students are Latino, following similar milestones reached recently by Latinos among public kindergarten students (in 2007) and public nursery school students (in 2006). Among all pre-K through 12<sup>th</sup> grade public school students, a record 23.9% are Latino. And for the first time, the number of 18- to 24-year-old Latino youth enrolled in college exceeded two million, reaching a record 16.5% of all college enrollments (Fry & Lopez, 2012). As students in nursery school progress through kindergarten and into elementary school and high school, Latino students are expected to become an even larger share of all school enrollments, including Catholic schools—where today only 15% of the students are identified as Latino (NCEA, 2015) and only 3% of all Latino students enrolled in elementary and secondary education attend Catholic schools (Suhy, 2012).<sup>7</sup>

In the last decade, the graduation rates for Latino students across the country have improved. Recent data indicates that Latino students are much less likely to drop out of high school than they were a decade ago. A recent study of high school graduation rates found that 78% of Latino students graduated from high school in 2010, an increase from 64% in 2000 (Murnane, 2013). Similarly, the number of Latino students in the US earning associate and bachelor's degrees has improved dramatically since 1977. However, despite these impressive gains, Pew Research Center data indicates that of all students completing Bachelor's degrees, only 11% were conferred on Latino students, despite the much touted fanfare about their increase in college enrollment. In fact, as Kelly, Schneider, and Carey (2010) state,

across the country, 51% of Hispanic students who start college complete a bachelor's degree in six years, compared to 59% of White students. That disparity holds true no matter the ability of the students or the reputation of the schools: Hispanic students graduate at lower rates

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7 Student diversity in Catholic schools has increased significantly in the past 40 years. It is worth noting that when data were first collected, the Hispanic/Latino population was included and the reports listed non-Whites as "minorities." In 1970, the diversity percentage was 10.8%, in 1980 it had increased to 19.4% and by 2010 was 29.8%. In 2015, the racial diversity is 20.4% and Hispanic/Latino is 15.3% (McDonald & Shultz, 2015).



than their White peers across similarly ranked colleges, from the nation's least selective to its most selective colleges and universities. (para. 3).

This discrepancy clearly points to a high attrition rate for Latino college students, which spurs concerns about the insitutional commitment of universities and colleges in ensuring that Latino students are served effectively.

### The Teaching Workforce

Despite the increasing number of Latino students in U.S. schools, 2010 national student enrollment in public schools when compared to the teaching force by race/ethnicity showed the overwhelming percentage of teachers educating Latino and other children of color are White. In fact, according to the National Center for Education Statistics (2008), 83% of the teaching force nationally is White, while only 7% of all classroom teachers are of Latino descent. This absence is also echoed in Catholic schools, where Latino educators comprise only 6.3 % of the workforce (Ospino, 2014).<sup>8</sup>

This fact alone is of dire concern, given the growing number of Latino students in large urban centers such as Los Angeles, Chicago, and New York, where they are already the majority and a rapidly growing percentage of new students who will matriculate into all systems of schooling, in the next decade. This cultural discrepancy in the teaching force brings to mind the idea posed by Antonio Gramsci (1971)—teachers, consciously or unconsciously, serve as conserving moral agents of the state. This factor cannot be ignored in light of more than four decades of research on culture and education, which has shown repeatedly that when Latino students are educated with culturally and linguistically responsive curriculum that positively engages their cultural strengths; are taught by Latino bicultural educators; and their parents are invited to participate in their school in meaningful ways, their academic achievement improves, irrespective of income level (Darder, 2012; Diaz-Soto & Haroon, 2010; Moll, Amanti, Neff, & González, 1992; Nieto, 2009).

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8 Hosffman Ospino's (2014) report *Hispanic Ministry in Catholic Parishes* also illustrates the significance of Latino presence. In parishes with active Hispanic Ministries, both the number of Latino teachers and the enrollment of Latino children in parochial schools were considerably higher.

Yet, unfortunately, the glaring over-representation of White teachers in all schools is an issue typically dismissed by the neoliberal culture of schooling today, with its “neutral” claim about the standardization of knowledge and overwhelming emphasis on science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM)—an emphasis that is often utilized to sideline the messiness of a humanities curriculum that places greater attention on the larger social and ethical questions of human existence. Accordingly, there is widespread negation of the histories, cultural traditions, and indigenous beliefs of Latino communities—knowledge that could well strengthen a sense of self-determination, social agency, academic confidence, and political empowerment, when cultivated among both Latino teachers and students. Instead, the views and perspectives of our teachers and students are often over-surveilled, their voices silenced, and cultural protocols marginalized, by authoritarian policies and practices of accountability that seek to homogenize Latino populations into a mainstream where deep structural inequality and poverty persist.

### The Persistence of Poverty

*As long as the problems of the poor are not radically resolved by rejecting the absolute autonomy of markets and financial speculation and by attacking the structural causes of inequality, no solution will be found for the world's problems or, for that matter, to any problems.*

—Pope Francis<sup>9</sup>

True to Pope Francis’s critique of the absolute autonomy of the market, one of the most distinctive features of the U.S. economy is its widening gap in income distribution. In fact, inequality has become so extreme in the US that it resembles the class-stratified societies of early twentieth century Europe. The U.S. economy continues to generate tremendous wealth, but the wealth does not reach working families, remaining concentrated at the top. Those in most need go without health care, quality education, or a living wage. One of the striking features of the growing significance of inequality in the United States seems to be our lack of financial knowledge—in a society, where more and more, decisions are predicated on the whims of the marketplace.

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9 (as cited in O’Leary, 2013, n. p.)

Yet, inequality matters and tackling its persistence is a matter of local, regional, and national importance. This is particularly the case for impoverished Latino communities, who comprise one of the most economically and socially disenfranchised populations in the United States today. Hence, as Pope Francis contends, seeking solutions to poverty should become central to all facets of society. His words also reinforce the tremendous need for the Church to take a more robust interest in the education of poor Latino communities. This is particularly so given that the lack of both educational and labor opportunities are associated with incapacitating life conditions, including an excess of social and material stressors that can result in poor health and increased mortality. While solutions often seem elusive, the Church and the nation ignore poverty at their own peril.

Comprehensive data from 2011 showed that over 50 million people in the US are living in poverty and this rate is now higher than it was in 1970. In the Latino community, the child poverty rate is 35%, in comparison to 12% of their White peers. The total raw number of Latino children living in poverty, however, is higher than the number for any other minority ethnic group in the United States (Lopez & Velasco 2011). Among them, the children of Latino immigrants are most likely to face dire conditions of poverty, in comparison to other U.S. children (Aizenman, 2009). And although, the poverty rate among all Latinos is 25%, Puerto Rican and Chicano/Mexicano populations—the two largest Latino populations in the US—have rates closer to 30% (Motel & Patten, 2012). Hence, nearly one in three Latinos today lives in poverty.

Poverty rates, moreover, are also closely tied to unemployment, with more than one in ten Latinos currently jobless. The joblessness amongst Latino youth is even worse. One in five young Latinos is unemployed. In certain cities across the U.S., nearly 50% of all youth of color cannot find jobs. Chicago, for example, is one of those cities with one of the highest metropolitan youth unemployment rates in the country. Of course, the overall joblessness is compounded by the historic loss of wealth in Latino communities, due to the recession in 2007. The unprecedented loss of homes and property fueled by the foreclosure crisis sent Latino net worth to an all time low. According to the 2010 census, the median wealth of White households is 18 times that of Latino households. Wealth inequalities by ethnicity are the largest recorded, since the government began publishing this data a quarter century ago (Domhoff, 2013); and it is a phenomenon that still appears to be grow-

ing, according to a December 2014 Pew Research Center report on widening inequality along racial/ethnic lines since the end of that recession (Kochhar & Fry, 2014).

The lack of jobs and other financial resources is making it much harder for communities to recover. Economists predict that it will take at least a full generation before Latino and Black communities regain what was lost in this last decade. And although the number of Latinos receiving a college degree (9%) has risen (Fry & Taylor, 2013), not only does the number of degrees conferred on Latinos still trail that of most other ethnic groups in the nation, there is also an increasing joblessness rate reported even among college graduates. So, despite reported increases in high school and college graduation rates, Latino youth are still experiencing conditions of persistent inequality in a worsening economic climate.

### **Conditions Faced by Latino Youth**

Although young Latino and Latina students tend to express optimism about their futures and place a high value on education, hard work, and educational success, national studies indicate that they are much more likely than White youth to drop out of school, become teenage parents, live in poverty, have higher levels of exposure to gang activity, experience higher incidences of police profiling and incarceration, and are more apt to be targeted for military recruitment, which is justified by military recruiters given that Latinos are considered to be underrepresented in the armed forces (Ash, Buck, Klerman, Kleykamp, & Loughran, 2009).

Further, a national report released in 2012 by the Social Science Research Council reported that 5.8 million young people, age 16 to 24, are living on the margins without even part-time jobs. Low-income African American and Latino youth nationally are most likely to be labeled “disconnected,” a term used to refer to lack of participation in school or work life (Burd-Sharps & Lewis, 2012).

This signals a difficult passage to adulthood for many Latino youth, who must already contend with higher rates of poverty and school dropout. Teen pregnancy among young Latinas places them in greater conditions of disadvantage than their male counterparts, making their conditions more similar to Black males. Hence, more young Latinas (20.3%)—many already young mothers—than young men (16.8%) are considered disconnected. And this phenomenon of youth disconnection is most prevalent in communities where

older adults have persistently struggled with high unemployment and economic instability. Hence, with vanishing opportunities in the labor market, it is not surprising that low-income Latino youth are more apt to respond affirmatively to military recruitment efforts, in the hopes of securing future financial stability for themselves and their families. Unfortunately, the impact of military service can be wrought with its own set of difficulties, once Latino and Latina soldiers return to civilian life.

The issue of incarceration also merits a brief note here, in that Juvenile Justice population comparisons show alarming disparities in youth incarceration. According to the Annie E. Casey Foundation Report *Reducing Youth Incarceration in the United States* (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2013),

Large disparities remain in youth confinement...African-American youth are nearly five times more likely to be confined than their white peers. Latino and American Indian youth are between two and three times more likely to be confined. The disparities in youth confinement rates point to a system that treats youth of color, particularly African Americans and Latinos, more punitively than similar white youth. (p.2)

And according to the Children's Defense Fund (CDF), one in six Latino boys born in 2001 are considered at risk of going to prison during their lifetime (CDF, 2007).

Concerned with staggering rates of school suspensions that criminalize youth, community advocates across the nation draw parallels with high dropout and unemployment rates for youth of color with the "school to prison pipeline" (Knefel, 2013). Along similar lines, 1.7% of the White population is incarcerated, as compared to more than 10% of the population of color in the US. This alarming disparity of incarceration, particularly for working-class men of color, suggests imprisonment may be employed as a de facto means for mass containment and regulation of impoverished populations. Moreover, poverty, poor literacy rates, and high dropout rates have all been correlated with probability of incarceration (Hammond, Linton, Smink, & Drew, 2007). And while school dropout, unemployment, and incarceration are typically blamed for poor social mobility among the poor, more often than not, an education does not prove to be the ticket to social mobility that most believe it to be.

### Myth of Social Mobility

Both the historical record and current statistical data confirm the persistence of Latinos among the nation's most educationally and economically disenfranchised populations. But why have these conditions changed so little over the last five decades, despite an unprecedented number of well-educated Latinos? Efforts to critically examine the persistence of Latino poverty and academic underachievement point to a powerful contradiction. On one hand, referring back to Pope Francis's words, most educational institutions are market-driven and tend to reproduce, often without intent, racialized class formations. This dynamic is perpetuated by way of recalcitrant structures of assimilative schooling that overtly or covertly function to undermine the cultural strength that Latino students bring to the classroom. As such, these students are expected to not only embrace the dominant cultural values of rugged individualism and competition, but also accept victim-blaming notions that put responsibility for poor social mobility squarely back on the shoulders of the most disenfranchised.

There is no question that education is widely upheld within the Church and the larger society as the great promise of upward social mobility, along with the many privileges this supposedly bestows. College graduation then is promulgated as the determining vehicle for both social and material success. In concert with the myth of the American dream, long held as the national ethos, this hidden curriculum encompasses a set of ideals that bolster a meritocratic system that claims to guarantee equal opportunity for prosperity and success. From this vantage point, upward mobility can readily be achieved through exhibiting individual hard work, personal perseverance, and a competitive spirit. In the process, education is lauded as the great democratizing process in action, where all can become educated and economically successful, if only they can persevere and excel according to an assimilationist ideal. In the process, not only does this view justify and shroud existing inequalities, but establishes the superior "merit" of the people at the top as the main criterion for success. Meanwhile, the blame for poverty is assigned to the poor themselves, inferring that they do not possess—genetically, culturally, or spiritually—the sufficient mettle to avail themselves of what is being offered.

This all too common notion obscures the structural origin of the difficult conditions faced by Latino students and their communities, as well as obstructs access to effective solutions that would invite a more communal approach to the problem and a genuine commitment to transforming the values,

structures, and relationships of exclusion that predominate across societal institutions, including the Church and Catholic education. Social mobility rhetoric, laced in bootstrap values of rugged individualism and “race to the top” perseverance, belies that fact that poverty trumps social mobility, with few exceptions.

Recent studies conclude that it is not only more difficult for poor Americans to rise up from the lower economic rungs, but that U.S. social mobility is actually lower than that of Canada and Western Europe (DeParle, 2012). In fact, a 2013 study by the Brookings Institution found inequality is rising amidst low social mobility and a growing gap between families at the top and the bottom of income distribution. This raises concerns about the ability of today’s impoverished class to work their way up the economic ladder; concluding that “upward social mobility is limited in the United States” (Greenstone, Looney, Patashnik, & Yu, 2013). This phenomenon is well-illustrated by income data from the Brookings Institution associated with parent’s income levels, which dramatically show that children born into low-income families are significantly more likely to remain stuck at the low-end of the income distribution as adults (Reeves & Howard, 2013).

Yet, despite the difficulties and contradictions at work, Latino educators, parents, and community organizations have worked, for almost a century, to support the education of their children—both within the Church and their communities. Two often cited school desegregation cases that predate *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) are *Roberto Alvarez v. the Board of Trustees of the Lemon Grove School District* (1941) and *Mendez v. Westminster* (1946). These efforts were grounded in parental belief that education can play a pivotal role in improving the future of their children and their community. These efforts, along with many others since then, reveal the importance that Latino communities attach to education, as well as the political agency and solidarity required to effect meaningful change. It has been through sustained communal efforts over the past five decades that Latino parents, teachers, and students have enacted their social agency to interrogate inequalities and work for educational justice. This is a phenomenon that has taken place within the context of Catholic education, as it has in the larger society.

Today, we see those efforts at work in Latino pro-immigrant struggles, where undocumented Latino immigrant youth and their allies have willingly put their personal security and lives on the line, in the struggle for both their cultural citizenship and immigrant educational rights. Their courageous efforts over the last decade have prompted heated national debates

and expanded dialogues about the rights of undocumented immigrants. And although pro-immigrant efforts have infused new life into this important issue, these have not yet led to passage of the Dream Act, which would provide immigration benefits to those who arrived in the United States as children, before the age of 16 and who resided in the US continuously, for at least five years prior to the bill being enacted into law. While recognizing the political possibilities of such movements, it is essential to also acknowledge the failure of many such efforts to integrate a substantive critique of structural economic inequalities, beyond the reach of individual academic effort. Even the campaign for the Dream Act has often been couched around a limited notion of individual rights and access to the American dream, which speaks simply to a pathway or entrance into a system of growing injustice, without linking the work to the need for a more egalitarian society.

Education and community practices then must move beyond notions of “social mobility” that have proven miserably inadequate, in that this approach has failed to contend with those institutional policies and practices that reproduce conditions of economic apartheid, racism, and social alienation, in the lives of Latino communities. From the standpoint of a serious historical analysis, it is glaringly obvious that widespread educational restructuring cannot possibly be accomplished without sustained dialogue and genuine participatory efforts for social and economic reform, grounded in what it means to exist within a genuinely democratic society. This said, it would do well for the Church and Catholic education, in specific, to take a more grounded and substantive approach to Latino education questions, by both entering into larger Latino educational debates and supporting community efforts to transform the schooling of all Latino students. Such an effort would, of course, demand that Catholic educators teaching within Latino communities critically challenge and transform deficit notions that bankrupt our emancipatory efforts, within the Church and the larger society.

### **Challenging Deficit Notions**

One of the most pervasive aspects of unacknowledged racism is the manner in which Latino students continue to be perceived as intellectually and culturally deficient. Longstanding perceptions and preconceptions of Mexican children as a “Mexican Problem” have been well documented by historian Gilbert G. Gonzalez (2013). Today, deficit notions still shape the pedagogy, curriculum, and classroom life of Latino students, particularly those from



poor working-class communities. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century the “Mexican Problem” has become the “Hispanic Problem,” in which notions of cognitive deficiencies pervade public debates on Latino immigration reform.<sup>10</sup> The disabling impact of deficit notions are readily apparent by the huge number of Latino students who sincerely believe that the reason they do poorly academically is because they are just too “dumb.” As a consequence, the victim-blaming ideology associated with processes of racialization in schools becomes well internalized, resulting in the often-touted achievement gap with its alarming disparities. An internalized belief of intellectual inferiority among Latino students can negatively impact in very real ways their educational progress and their aspirations for the future.

Even more disconcerting is the manner in which disparities in achievement are attached to “evidence-based” measures that negate the impact of assimilative learning conditions, with respect to both language and culture. Consequently, on measures of reading and writing proficiency, for example, Latino students are almost twice as likely as their White peers to score below basic levels (*The Nation’s Report Card*, 2013). These test scores are, nonetheless, liberally employed to legitimate the achievement gap, without critically questioning the problematic classroom conditions that lead to poor performance among Latino students. Hence, it is not surprising that across all categories, students of color are found to lag behind.

Similarly, as mentioned earlier, suspension and expulsion rates for Black and Latino students are deplorable. According to the study *Out of School & Off Track: The Overuse of Suspensions in American Middle and High Schools* (Losen & Martinez, 2013), the rate of secondary school suspensions for Black (24%) and Latino students (12%) has doubled since 1972, while that of White peers only slightly increased. In the same study, the break down for secondary school data for Latino English Language Learners revealed a serious increase in their risk for suspension, particularly among males. The severity of the

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10 This issue of deficient intelligence among Latino immigrant resurfaced in 2013 public debates spurred on by Harvard graduate Jason Richwine, whose doctoral dissertation advanced the notion that Hispanic populations have lower IQs than Whites (Richwine, 2009). This argument is in the tradition of scientific racism formerly advanced by *Bell Curve* co-author Charles Murray (Herrnstein & Murray, 1996), Richwine’s mentor at Harvard. This came to public attention after Richwine co-authored an immigration policy report (Rector & Richwine, 2013) for the conservative think tank, the Heritage Foundation. For several thoughtful critiques of racism and intelligence testing, see *Chicano Education in the Era of Segregation* (Gonzalez, 2013) and *Culture and Power in the Classroom* (Darder, 2012).

issue not only prompted a nationwide call for a moratorium on the use of expulsion and suspensions, but also a recent Department of Justice investigation into discriminatory policies in Florida's Palm Beach County, where ELL students were not being allowed to enroll in the county's public schools, and those who did were found to have much higher suspension and expulsion rates compared to other students (Losen & Martinez, 2013). This increasing use of suspensions and expulsion, as mentioned earlier, is strongly linked to an increase in high school dropout rates, which remain stubbornly high with more than 40% of Latino youth over the age of 19 failing to earn a high school diploma (Cardenas & Kirby, 2012). These disturbing statistics point to not only untenable circumstances faced by Latino students, but also the failure of many schools to support their social and academic well-being.

### **The New Face of Segregation**

Despite hopeful desegregation reform efforts initiated by the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision in the 1950s, the proportion of Latino students attending segregated schools has actually increased in the last two decades, particularly in large urban school districts, where Latino student enrollments are now heavily concentrated. A report released by the Civil Rights Project, *E Pluribus...Separation: Deepening Double Segregation for Students* (Orfield, Kucsera, & Siegel-Hawley, 2012), "shows that segregation has increased seriously across the country for Latino students, who are attending more intensely segregated and impoverished schools than they have for generations" (p. 1). Student enrollment by ethnicity in high-poverty versus low-poverty schools shows an inverse relationship, particularly for low-income Latino elementary students who attend not only the poorest schools but some of the most segregated in the nation. Accordingly, Latino students have become the new face of segregation. In concert, the proportions of Latino students who graduate from high school prepared for college admission and then enroll in college or university still remain low. And despite increases in educational attainment in recent years, the body of research in the field well attests that educational conditions for Latino and Latina students have remained chronic, over the last 50 years (Darder & Torres, 2014).

In challenging deficit notions, it is important that the persistence of low achievement and failure not be explained away by discriminatory views that see the problem as housed in the nature or culture of Latino communities or the lack of intellectual potential of our children. In the past, such victim-

blaming perspectives were the most common conclusions drawn from social science research on the academic failure of Latino students. Too often culturally deterministic views that engender such research reinforce racialized perceptions that further disenfranchise Latino students, most who are already struggling with challenging circumstances of life. And although we can find a plethora of research on the education of Latino students today, mainstream educational policies and practices often still echo, albeit in more sophisticated terms, a belief in the cultural inferiority of Latino children. In contrast, seldom do we find sustained public proclamations for structural change in the schooling of Latino students, beyond neoliberal solutions that commodify knowledge, instrumentalize teaching, and convert students into clients and parents into stakeholders—as if they genuinely held decisive power to educational decisions, within the existing structures of inequity that persist.

Despite a history that reveals the persistence of discrimination, the struggle for educational justice persists. In response, Latinos have used political pressure and the legal system to struggle for equal education. A poignant example is found in the struggle of Mexican Americans in the Southwest who, despite a shared belief in the value of education, faced major obstacles (San Miguel, 2013). As economic conditions permitted, these parents presented their children for enrollment, but often their children were either not accepted or segregated and, more often than not, provided only a substandard education. In frustration, some Latino parents turned to Catholic schools, in the hopes that this would afford their children a better opportunity. However, since, only a limited number of children were accepted into parochial schools—which often also reflected racializing deficit notions—Latino parents fought difficult uphill battles to advocate on behalf of their children. For example, inspired by the educational efforts of the Chicano Movement, *Católicos Por La Raza* (CPLR) organized and held a demonstration and a mass in downtown Los Angeles in 1968 to call attention to conditions of Catholic education (Acuña, 2013). Catholic High School students rose up for change in the Church, calling upon the Church leadership to use its wealth to help solve the poor educational conditions of Chicano and Chicana students in Catholic schools (Sánchez Walsh, 2013).<sup>11</sup> Beyond building of new parish schools, which more recently have been rapidly closing, seldom has the Church, as an institution, stood officially on the side of cultural democracy, as

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11 See Acuña (2013) and Sánchez Walsh (2013) for images of the *Católicos por La Raza* activities.

Latino parents fought for the education of their children and the dignity of our humanity. And when this has been the case, it generally has been due to the efforts of individual priests, religious, or members of the Hispanic Ministry.

### **Cultural Democracy: Beyond One-Dimensional Humanity**

*We need...to counter the dominance of a one-dimensional vision of the human person, a vision that reduces human beings to what they produce and to what they consume. This is one of the most insidious temptations of our time.*

—Pope Francis<sup>12</sup>

The concept of cultural democracy<sup>13</sup> is introduced here precisely as a pluralistic means to counter the one-dimensionality associated with ethnocentric schooling. Generally speaking, cultural democracy is conceptualized through related communal commitments that include: (a) protection and promotion of the integrity of cultural worldviews, cultural difference, and the cultural rights of all people; (b) encouragement of active participation in the cultural life of the community and society; (c) social and material structural conditions that enable all cultural communities to participate in decisions that affect the quality of our lives; and (d) consistent and on-going policies and practices to ensure just and equitable access to cultural and material resources and institutional support (Adams & Goldbard, 1995).

With these communal commitments in mind, the inclusiveness and socially just emphasis of a culturally democratic philosophy of education functions to counter persistent colonizing values of the past, which have become normalized within most U.S. mainstream institutions, including the Church and Catholic education, and imposed on Latino, Black, and indigenous communities and additional populations perceived as “others.” In response, values and attitudes that require rethinking include commonsensical beliefs in progress that privilege the dominant epistemology and culture as superior and enact ethnocentric policies and practices to dominate and control those

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12 (2013a)

13 This brief discussion of the concept of cultural democracy is based on earlier work that has appeared in *Culture & Power in the Classroom* (Darder, 1991). For a more substantive discussion of this topic see the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition of the text (Darder, 2012).

perceived as less worthy of opportunities or less capable of self-governance. These values inherent to dominant discourses of modernity prevail within Catholic schools and other societal institutions, steeped in values that celebrate self-reliance and bootstrap individualism over communal values of interdependence and cooperation, more prevalent in the epistemological worldview of working-class Latino communities.

Central to the concept of cultural democracy is a fundamental relationship that exists between culture and power. By culture, this refers here to all the relational and organizational structures—historically, socially, and materially situated—around which relations of power are organized within institutions, communities, and societies. Embedded within cultural relationships of individual and communal life are the underlying philosophical and epistemological assumptions about that world and the different configurations of power relations that conserve ways of being considered legitimate and superior (Darder, 2012). It is precisely this relationship between culture and power and its movement within the context of a dominant culture that subordinates those considered “other,” which is usually missing from mainstream discourses of multiculturalism or cultural inclusivity. Instead, there is *political pretense* that when any two cultures come in contact, they are on an equal playing field. History plainly demonstrates that nothing could be farther from the truth. The consequence then is that, without addressing the deeper oppressive structures predicated on Eurocentric cultural notions of truth, structural inequalities remain untouched in society, the Church, and schools.

Hence, in order to understand and critically engage the relationship between culture and power, Catholic educators must also comprehend the dynamics that exist between what is considered truth (or knowledge) and power—for it is this relationship that must be questioned with respect to its ethnocentric impact on schooling and control over what constitutes knowledge in Catholic schools today.

Truth...is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power. Each society has its regime of truth, its “general politics” of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements; the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true. (Foucault, 1977, p. 131)

As such, those in power shape our understanding of the world. So, while individuals shape their own identities, the power relations that determine what constitutes legitimate truths are also shaping us. Joe Kincheloe (2008), for example, explained that in the 1700s, Western societies came to see that it was far more efficient to utilize power to influence individual consciousness in ways that supported the interests of the powerful, rather than to resort to brutal force in seeking compliance. "Power connects with the heart and soul of individuals, disciplines their bodies, shapes their attitudes, their language, the ways they learn, and their phenomenological level of existence. In such a disciplined society, power wielders would not have to use violence as often, as they could count on the citizen's individual consciousness to mold their behaviors" (p. 219). An implicit but important assumption here is that, if the process of schooling is to be informed by cultural democracy, Catholic educators must recognize that the inability of Latino communities to express our cultural truths is directly tied to asymmetrical relations of power that subordinate the expression of our cultural knowledge, wisdom, and ways of being.

### **Dominant and Subordinate Cultures**

A dialectical or relational view of culture and its link to social power is essential to understanding the dominant cultural logic that upholds culturally subordinate or repressive power relations that exist in American society and, thus, can be tenaciously embedded in Catholic Church and school policies and practices. Culture then does not function in a vacuum, but rather as a social system characterized by social stratification and tensions (Freire & Macedo, 1987). It is also significant to note that subordinate cultures are marginalized not only through the dominant culture's function to legitimate the interests and values of dominant groups, but also through an ideology that invalidates Latino cultural values, heritage, language, knowledge, and lived experiences that fall outside the purview of the Western gaze—this points to significant human dimensions that are essential for the survival of subordinate cultures. Keeping this in mind can help us understand how Latinos, for example, are situated and recreated within social and material processes of society that are, in fact, inextricably shaped by a politics of assimilation. And this is only perpetuated through a hidden curriculum that obscures relations of power and deculturates those students considered inferior or problematic to the dominant ethos.

### Cultural Invasion

Throughout American institutions, including the Church, the dominant culture employs dominant practices that exert control over working-class racialized populations and, by so doing, perpetuates a condition that Freire (1971) called *cultural invasion*. This speaks to antidialogical processes that sustain social, political, and economic oppression of subordinate groups. Freire (1971) described cultural invasion as a process by which

The invaders penetrate the cultural context of another group, in disrespect of the latter's potentialities; they impose their own view of the world upon those they invade and inhibit the creativity of the invaded by curbing their expression. . . . The invaders act; those they invade have only the illusion of acting through the action of the invaders. . . . All domination involves invasion . . . a form of economic and cultural domination. (p. 150)

Given the impact of schooling processes shaped by the subordinating forces of cultural invasion, any attempt to create an effective educational foundation for Latino students must also challenge ethnocentric ideologies and practices that result in further domination of students, based on the color of their skin and the language they speak. Understanding, therefore, how the dominant culture perpetuates the internalization of inferiority, language domination, racism and the debilitating impact of these on the academic formation of Latino students is key to breaking free from culturally invasive dynamics that betray our well-meaning efforts to serve Latino communities.

### Internalization of Inferiority

One of the most insidious aspects in how the process of cultural invasion functions is through the internalization of inferiority, which is then often perpetuated by Latinos students and their families. So often this results from a process of schooling that has systematically conditioned Latino students to identify with the assumed superiority of the dominant culture to the extent that they participate in their own cultural negation. About this, Freire (1971), argued,

for cultural invasion to succeed, it is essential that those invaded become convinced of their intrinsic inferiority . . . The more invasion is

accentuated and those invaded are alienated from the spirit of their own culture and from themselves, the more the latter want to be like the invaders: to walk like them, dress like them, talk like them. (p. 161)

This is precisely what a culturally democratic educational practice seeks to transform, so that Latino students within Catholic education and beyond can truly find the place to be themselves and to exercise their cultural knowledge and language as an asset to their academic formation, rather than a hindrance.

### **Language Domination**

Language domination is sustained via a twofold process. First, the language that many bicultural students bring to the classroom is systematically silenced and stripped away, through values and beliefs that render it inferior to Standard English. Second, the traditional literacy process in U.S. schools perpetuates subordinate social relations through an instrumental approach that functions to discourage the development of critical literacy among working-class Latino students (Diaz-Soto & Haroon, 2010; Nieto, 2009). Accordingly, many Latino students are forced to contend with institutional negation and disrespect of their linguistic codes. In many Catholic schools, Latino students are not only discouraged but also actively prevented from speaking their native language. Catholic educators often justify these practices with concerns that Spanish will interfere with the student's intellectual and emotional development (Diaz-Soto & Haroon, 2010; Grande, 2004; Ramirez, Castaneda, & Herold, 1974). No matter how well-meaning, Freire and Macedo (1987) point to the xenophobic beliefs that undergird this view, which

blindly negates the pluralistic nature of U.S. society and falsifies the empirical evidence in support of bilingual education, as has been amply documented. These educators...fail to understand that it is through multiple discourses that students generate meaning in their everyday social context. (p. 154)

Therefore, it is critical that Catholic educators recognize the role language plays as one of the most powerful transmitters of culture and, as such, its central role to both intellectual formation and the survival of subordinate cultural populations. Within a student's primary language is contained the codification of lived experiences that provide avenues for students to ex-



press their own realities and to question the wider social order. Similarly, the primary language holds huge significance with respect to learning and brain development (Lipina & Colombo, 2009) and to children's formation of self-confidence and sense of intimacy and security within their own cultural community—both hugely significant to the academic formation of Latino children. Catholic school practices that ignore the significance of students' primary language unwittingly hinder students' critical capacities and prevent the development of understanding necessary to their intellectual development and social empowerment.

### Racism

Racism represents one of the most pervasive forms of human oppression in U.S. society today and yet, it seems one of the most difficult for individuals of the dominant culture to comprehend. Often the difficulty arises in faulty perceptions and assumptions that persist in the epistemological framework of Euroamericans. In addition to strong ethnocentric values, much of the difficulty here is related to a pervasive and commonsensical ideology of race, with its hierarchical view of races, coupled with a worldview that effectively obstructs the ability of most Euroamericans to move from an individual perception of bias and prejudice to an understanding of racism as a structural phenomenon associated with institutional power and control and perpetuated through the process of schooling. This is particularly so when questions of inequalities are simultaneously tied to class privilege. Yet, the ability to comprehend racism as an institutional phenomenon is essential to addressing educational policies and practices of inequality in Catholic schools (McCarthy et al., 2005).

Racism in the form of ethnocentrism most often manifests in standards of behavior considered color-blind, by which everything is judged and compared. These standards are based on the implicit assumptions of the dominant culture that retains power within a multicultural society (Parker, Deyhle, & Villenas 1999; Phillips, 1979). This phenomenon is particularly prevalent in color-blind views that persist in Catholic schools today. The hidden curriculum of White superiority silences the voices of Latino students, by ignoring their experiences of racism. Hence, unexamined racialized assumptions support an assimilative bias held by many Catholic educators—well-meaning and devout teachers who too often fail to perceive the racism embedded in their tendencies to judge and compare the success of poor and working-class Latino students against that of more affluent students from the dominant culture.

However, most Catholic educators seem genuinely unaware of their unexamined expectations and everyday practices that loudly signal to Latino students that in order to “succeed,” they must adopt dominant cultural values as their own. Well-meaning Catholic educators often, similarly, express that they “love all their students” or that they believe “all people are the same,” or that they “treat all students the same,” without acknowledging either the cultural differences or the asymmetrical relations of power at work within their classrooms. The most damaging consequence of this approach, of course, is that Catholic educators can fail to see that Latina and Latino students already possess cultural values and community knowledge that are not only essential to their learning, but to their survival—given their community histories of struggle in the face of gross inequalities and social exclusions. Many Catholic educators can, therefore, easily miss the essence, nuances, and inner complexities that are inherent to being bicultural; and, thus, inadvertently invalidate the lived experiences of Latino students by rejecting the definitions and meanings that Latino students and parents offer about their own lives and their communities.

Important to this discussion is also the distinction between individual racism and institutional racism. “The first consists of overt acts by individuals...the second type is less overt, far more subtle, less identifiable in terms of specific individuals committing the acts. But it is no less destructive of human life” (Ture & Hamilton, 1992, p. 4). Some concrete examples may help to shed some light on this distinction. When a teacher consistently nags and humiliates Latino students because they do not speak “proper” English, this is an act of individual racism. But when a community of Latino parents complains to the principal or parish priest and no action is taken to halt the teacher’s actions, then, it becomes a form of institutional racism. When a social studies teacher glosses over the impact of colonization and presents the story as one of benevolence, this is an act of individual racism. That this teacher is knowingly permitted by school administrators to perpetuate this discourse in the classroom is an act of institutional racism. What is most significant here is that both forms of racism result from deep-rooted prejudices and stereotypes. But institutional racism is a form of racialized discrimination that is woven into the fabric of the power relations, social arrangements (i.e. school policies), and practices through which collective actions result in the use of a racialized criterion to determine who is inequitably rewarded in schools (Knowles & Prewitt, 1969). Institutional racism can only result when it is, knowingly or unknowingly, bolstered by institutional resources, power, and authority.

In direct opposition, a culturally democratic practice can only be accomplished when institutional resources, power, and authority are utilized in the interest of genuinely democratic attitudes and relationships with respect to differences. Hence, in the same spirit of institutional justice and human equality forged in John Dewey's (1916) education writings or Paulo Freire's (1971) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, the concept of cultural democracy seeks to function here as an educational perspective, in concert with Catholic social teachings, that can transform the ethnocentric constriction of mainstream classroom life. Above all, it represents a concerted effort to awaken and cultivate the voices and participation of Latino students as active social actors within the Church, their education, and in the world.

### Rethinking the Role of the Church

*Today, we need a Church capable of walking at people's side, of doing more than simply listening to them; a Church which accompanies them on their journey; a Church able to make sense of the 'night' contained in the flight of so many of our brothers and sisters from Jerusalem; a Church which realizes that the reasons why people leave also contain reasons why they can eventually return. But we need to know how to interpret, with courage, the larger picture.*

—Pope Francis<sup>14</sup>

What does this extensive discussion mean for the role of the Church and Catholic education in Latino communities? Latinos, as the country's fastest-growing ethnic population, now make up nearly 40% of all Catholics and this number is expected to grow in the coming years, as the birthrate of Latinos exceeds all other ethnic populations in the US. Today, approximately 60% of all Latinos identify as Catholic; and Latino immigrant populations are said to be "contributing significantly to the stability of American Catholicism" (Shrank, 2013, n.p.). Hence, there is no doubt that the Church continues to serve as an important hub for Latino community life and particularly for Spanish-speaking congregants; and, as such, can play a pivotal role in supporting the educational advancement of Latino communities in this country.

Typically, however, the Church has taken a more passive role on educational debates seen as outside the purview of Church orthodoxy. Yet, today,

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14 (Francis, 2013d)

even within the Church, there is growing concern with decreasing enrollment in Catholic schools. In the past decade, 16% of Catholic schools across the nation closed. Enrollment nationwide declined 23%, driven by a variety of factors, including changes in demography. Nevertheless, only about 4% of all Latino children currently attend Catholic schools. This suggests that if the Church is to support Latino communities, its exclusive focus on parochial education must be rethought, along with any deficit perspectives that might betray the emancipatory interests of Latino children.

For example, Catholic education within the Latino community has often played a paradoxical role. The commonsense belief in the superiority of Catholic private education inadvertently has served to reinscribe a meritocracy of class privilege and power. Historically, Catholic students who were admitted and whose parents could afford to pay for tuition were considered an exclusive group, seen as deserving of greater privilege and opportunities, than the excluded. Meanwhile, students who did not pass the entrance exam or whose family could not afford the tuition were considered justifiably excluded. Seldom questioned were the politics of testing or culturally oppressive practices or the material conditions of inequality that influenced the academic performance of excluded students. Some of these attitudes, unfortunately, persist even today with authoritarian proponents that advocate for steeper practices of competition as the solution to effective intellectual formation.

Whether one agrees with this view or not, the question remains: What of the other 96% of Latino students who attend other systems of education? The question is a legitimate one to consider here, given that educational rights have been a central concern of the Church in the US. In fact, Catholic schooling began “in a spirit of protest,” when Church leaders of the mid-1800s protested the discrimination of Catholic children, who were forced to read Protestant texts. Ignored and maligned by state legislatures, the Church turned to its congregations, demanding that every parish build and support a school and that all Catholic families enroll their children in a Catholic school. The result was the largest private school system in the world, entirely supported by a largely working-class minority population. Moreover, sisters from religious orders predominantly staffed Catholic schools<sup>15</sup> during this era—an exceedingly important factor in the growth of the parochial school system in this country.

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15 National Catholic Educational Association report, *U.S. Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools 2014-2015* (McDonald & Shultz, 2015) confirms the dramatic shift, where 97.2 % of full-time profession staff is Laity, while today only 2.8 % is today Religious/Clergy.

It is this same spirit of protest that now must ignite Church concerns related to the material and cultural discrimination of Latino communities today. The Church cannot afford to see the issue of education within solely a Catholic vacuum, but rather must see it as a larger community question, deserving of the Church's attention and investment. This to suggest that the Church must take a proactive leadership role in creating the conditions, by which Latino communities can reflect and act upon the importance of education. This echoes Pope Francis' sentiment in *Apostolic Letter to all the Consecrated People on the Occasion of the Year of Consecrated Life*, "I also expect from you what I have asked all the members of the Church: to come out of yourselves and go forth to the existential peripheries" (2014, No. 4). Such a process of going forth entails working *with* communities in ways that support a shared vision and humanizing purpose for education. Moreover, this work must be understood in concert with the Church's responsibility to act in solidarity with the most vulnerable populations, in order to transform the discriminatory conditions of their lives. This idea is clearly in sync with the tenets of Catholic social teaching, which views the work with the most vulnerable populations as central to the Church's mission in the world.

Here, Church authority and Catholic school leadership must move to abandon authoritarian postures, in order to cultivate greater possibilities for ecumenical dialogue and solidarity with and among disenfranchised Latino populations. Accordingly, the establishment of liberatory relationships with formerly colonized populations such as Latino in the U.S. must also encompass a commitment to the process of decolonization. This to say, the Church's relationship with Latino populations must go beyond traditional missionary paradigms, which have oftentimes reinscribed deficit notions. Instead, ministerial and pedagogical relationships with Latino communities must be anchored to the concrete experiences and conditions of our everyday lives. The Church can work through its Catholic educational leaders to consider larger questions of schooling, in ways that promote the social agency, responsibility, and consciousness of the Church, school, and community, in the interest of greater educational justice for Latino students—within and outside the traditional scope of the Church. Just as Catholic congregants are expected to bring our faith to all secular arenas, so too should the Church be a living example of struggle for the most vulnerable in the world today—but not in ways that perpetuate a view of the vulnerable as *welcomed outsider*, but rather as members of the human family that must also have a place at the table of decision-making and the future evolution of both the Church and

society. Beyond its powerful pedagogical role at the pulpit, the Church must then take up Pope Francis's edict to walk alongside Latino communities and accompany us on our journey toward a building a better world.

### Catholic Education as Revolutionary Labor

*I ask you, instead, to be revolutionaries, to swim against the tide; yes, I am asking you to rebel against this culture that sees everything as temporary and that ultimately believes that you are incapable of responsibility, that you are incapable of true love.*

—Pope Francis<sup>16</sup>

In many of his recent public proclamations, Pope Francis has called upon the clergy, the faithful, and the world to not only reinstate our concern for the poor, but also to be revolutionaries and rebels in this time of crisis, against the loveless forces of oppression that spiritually and materially impoverish us all. The “true love” that Pope Francis references above is reminiscent of Paulo Freire’s pedagogy of love and Gustavo Gutierrez’s “theology as a love letter.” This is a love for the Divine that goes beyond dogma, disembodied theory, or affiliations, to unite the love of the Church and the people in action within community, for the well being of our brethren and the world. This declaration of love by the Pope must fully inform Catholic education in the Latino community and the Church’s commitment to a socially just world.

Similarly, through integrating the seven principles of Catholic social teaching—life and dignity of the human person; family, community and participation; rights and responsibilities; option for the poor and vulnerable; dignity of work and rights of workers; solidarity; and care for God’s creation (USCCB, 2005)—in conjunction with cultural democracy, a more justly grounded sense of well-being and community can potentially evolve, through fostering authentic relationships of participation between Latino communities and the Church. Moreover, through culturally democratic strategies founded on Catholic social teaching (Heft, 2006), policies and practices of inequality that interfere with the spiritual and educational formation of Latino communities within the Church, Catholic schools, and the larger society can be better challenged and transformed, with greater coherence to principles of social justice. This entails recognition that in order to bring about both

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16 (Francis, 2013c)

attitudinal and structural change requires the combined efforts of all, working as both individuals and in community. This is particularly salient for Latino communities whom will be most affected by the new conditions that should emerge. Ultimately, social change requires commitment, faith, and personal strength by Church leadership and Catholic educators to work with parishioners in the world.

This revolutionary labor encompasses a deep and humble commitment to communal participation and an underlying faith in the capacity of the people to evolve and reinvent together structures that can meet the essential needs of their lives. This, undoubtedly, encompasses a dramatic shift in the exercise of power and the establishment of more horizontal relationships that open the epistemological field for the evolution of consciousness and the transformation of education. Catholic education by this definition must welcome the Latino community itself, with policies and practices enacted in our primary culture and language. By so doing, a powerful praxis, founded on love and dignity, can support the critical dialogue required to reflect, to name, to critique, and to learn together, so that our teaching can work to dismantle the injustice that chokes off our existence, as Catholics and citizens of the world. In his address from the pastoral visit to Cagliari in September, 2013, Pope Francis asserts, “All the wars, all the strife, all the unresolved problems over which we clash are due to the lack of dialogue” (as cited in Birch, 2015). His uncompromising faith in the power of dialogue, rooted in love, serves then as an indispensable ethical foundation for a humanizing pedagogy for Church ministry and for Catholic education.

Pope Francis calls for a transformation of consciousness for Catholics and non-Catholics alike; and that we take on this challenge with courage, commitment, and resolve. Hence, the Church too must change in its practice and aspire more fully to stretch beyond the boundaries of its place of sanctuary and security, as we must all. And this we must do in order to work together in the mundane world of our everyday lives—where quotidian forms of educational injustices have become most normalized and persistent. It is here that a culturally democratic form of Catholic education can best cultivate and nurture a place for on-going public dialogue for social justice. A revolutionary labor of Catholic educators then is one that focuses consistently on the establishment of humanizing relationships within the classroom and communities—relationships linked to the development of consciousness and social responsibility.

Through creating culturally democratic conditions of Catholic education, that center on dialogue and democratic participation in the life of the larger society, educational issues of Latino students can be linked effectively to the overall well being of Latino families and their dreams of a better life for their children. The underlying assumption here is that the Church and Catholic education have a moral responsibility to be responsive to the needs of Latino populations, who constitute one of the most faithful populations in the Church. However, tending to the spiritual needs of a community, without serious regard for their culture or the larger societal forces that negatively impact their personal freedom and social development is not only shortsighted, but unconscionable in light of the radical commitment to the poor expressed by the Holy Father. Catholic Social Teaching anchored in culturally democratic principles—with an interest in both Church and community—seems an ideal place from which to tackle more substantive ethical and practical concerns with respect to the education of Latino students.

Through the integration of the cultural and linguistic knowledge of Latino communities within parochial education, Catholic educators committed to cultural democracy can also generate a deeper sense of familiarity, more fluidity in communication, and enter into communal solidarity with an oppressed population, who to this day remains in the process of democratic formation within the Church and beyond. Through encompassing an understanding of the culture, language, history, and the difficult conditions faced by Latinos in this hemisphere—along with a vision of faith, hope, and possibility—the work of Catholic educators for social justice can move toward a more participatory practice of education in Latino communities today.

Through its prominent intermediary role between Church and community, Catholic educators possess a vital opportunity to participate *with* Latino populations in the process of their democratic formation within the US, many who may have had few opportunities for political participation in their lives, but yet yearn for a more just future for their children. By effectively interpreting, with courage and resolve, the oppressive conditions at work in the lives of Latino students, Latino Catholic educators, in particular, can serve as a viable humanizing force in this work. Anchored in an intimate knowledge of culture, history, language, and the biculturation experience, the Church in general and Catholic education in particular can begin to enter into a new relationships with Latino communities—one in which the voices and participation of Latino students reside at the center of the educational discourse, rather than ignored or forgotten on the margins.



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*Antonia Darder holds the Leavey Endowed Chair of Ethics and Moral Leadership at Loyola Marymount University and is Professor Emerita of the University of Illinois, Urbana Champaign.*