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The Education in an Intercultural Society: Problems and Challenges for Immigrant Hispanic/Latino
Students

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At no other time in the history of the United States has immigration, both legal and illegal, so impacted the nation's schools and its economy. Throughout the last decade of the 20th Century the immigrant population grew by 11.3 million, with Spanish speakers from Mexico and Latin America accounting for largest percentage of that number, approximately 30% (Camarota & McArdle, 2003). By state, the percentages are even more dramatic. For example, between 1990 and 2000, in Arizona, immigrants from Mexico alone grew from 55% to 67%, and in Texas, Mexicans increased from 59% to 65% of the total (Camarota & McArdle, 2003). At the school level, the numbers of Latinos continue to mount as evidenced in two of the nation's largest school districts-- in Houston Independent School District, there were 122,745 Latino¹ students (58.1%) in 2003-2004 (Texas Education Agency, 2005) and in Los Angeles, there were 554,113 (73%) during the same period (Los Angeles Unified School District, 2005). For some of the nation's smaller school districts, the numbers also have increased. For example, in a predominately rural area in East Texas among 52 school districts, the Latino school population increased over a six year period from 1998 to 2004 by slightly more than 30% (Texas Education Agency, 2005).

The concentration of Latinos from Mexico, Central America, and Cuba is focused in 12 states: California, Texas, Illinois, Arizona, Florida, Colorado, New York, New Jersey, Virginia, Maryland, Louisiana, and Georgia (Camarota & McArdle, 2003). This concentration has tremendous consequences for the economy of the respective states along with the reciprocal benefits to the immigrants themselves.

Most immigrants tell the story of coming to the United States for the economic benefit. Many of

¹ For the purposes of this paper, we use the word, "Latino," because for the most part, we are distinguishing the people from Mexico, Central America, South America, and Caribbean Islands.

the immigrants from Mexico have been accustomed to being entrepreneurs, making their living very creatively in their small towns or cities in small food kiosks or in street vending. So, they come with dreams, hopes, and creative economic experiences. Though they come, it is difficult to progress rapidly. According to Garcia y Griego and Martin (2000), progress may be slow and salaries lower due to differences in age, education, income, and household size, since immigrant families tend to be larger, headed by younger adults who tend to earn lower wages, and more likely to have school-aged children. They also indicated that "it is hard to measure the economic benefits and costs of immigrants. Periodic accounting estimates provide a measurement at a point in time; estimates that compare immigrant taxes to the cost of the public services they consume show that taxes do not cover service costs. The major reason for the taxes-costs gap is the cost of educating the children of immigrants, which can be considered a long-term investment as well as a short-term cost." Garcia y Griego and Martin (2000), furthered their thoughts indicating that long-term growth prospects depend in large part on how well the children of immigrants are educated, and how many go to college, how many immigrants with little education will get adult education, how well the children succeed in school and the labor market, how many of those children will attain a college degree.

According to Grow (2004) "Despite low family incomes, which at \$33,000 a year lag the national average of \$42,000, Hispanics' soaring buying power increasingly influences the food Americans eat, the clothes they buy, and the cars they drive. They have many more years of buying power due to their young age. Companies are scrambling to revamp products and marketing to reach the fastest-growing consumer group. Latino flavors are seeping into mainstream culture, too. With Hispanic youth a majority of the under-18 set, or close to it, in cities such as Los Angeles, Miami, and San Antonio, what's hip there is spreading into suburbia, much the way rap exploded out of black neighborhoods in the late 1980s."

Latinos appear to be able to, through persistence and hard work, improve their living conditions. Though still low, Grow (2004) continued, "Latino's disposable income has jumped 29% since 2001, to \$652 billion last year, double the pace of the rest of the population, according to the Selig Center for Economic Growth at the University of Georgia. Similarly, the ranks of Latino entrepreneurs has jumped by 30% since 1998, calculates the Internal Revenue Service."

In a hegemonic society, as evidenced in recent writings by Huntington (2004) and Hanson (2003), with the domination of thought being the middle class white male, the language becomes a barrier to economic upward mobility. Those pundits claim that the non-English speaking actually send the economy into a downward spiral. They promote the melding of cultures and a one language system. They suggest that that if Latinos are allowed to continue their culture and language and not assimilate, rather only to acculturate, that specifically, this situation will promote a separate and unequal society. Latinos, they indicate, would be held in lower class positions and would be set in language and culture groups aside from mainstream America. However, even as and if Latino's English language is improved, prejudices still are observed due to sometimes maintained thick Spanish accents or continuous grammatical errors-- certainly making an inequitable perception of their intelligence and abilities. The underlying point that these men are making appears to go straight to the heart of the economy-- the point-- language is power, economic power.

In many cases, as the children progress in school, the children become the mouthpieces of the parents, negotiating small deals to large ones such as the purchase of a car. Though the quick acquisition of the English language presents a problem for many immigrants, we have observed, on the other hand, that the Spanish language group, itself, is a growing economic power in the United States. The immigration of Latinos appears to be unlike that of any other large immigrant group, such as the Germans over 200 years ago. Whereas the Germans assimilated much more rapidly, learning and using

English as indentured servants, the sheer numbers of Latinos immigrating with their strong ties to their culture and language, the proliferation of mass media, maintenance of Latino communities, and the general private and governmental responses to these late 20th and early 21st Century arrivals are different. According to Grow (2004), 78% of U.S. Latinos speak Spanish, even if they also know English, according to the Census Bureau. More specifically, in maintaining the language and culture, the 21 million Mexicans have something no other immigrant group has had: “They are a car ride away from their home country. Many routinely journey back and forth, allowing them to maintain ties that Europeans never could. The dual identities are reinforced by the constant influx of new Latino immigrants -- roughly 400,000 a year, the highest flow in U.S. history. The steady stream of newcomers will likely keep the foreign-born, who typically speak mostly or only Spanish, at one-third of the U.S. Hispanic population for several decades. Their presence means that ‘Spanish is constantly refreshed, which is one of the key contrasts with what people think of as the melting pot,’ says Roberto Suro, director of the Pew Hispanic Center, a Latino research group in Washington” (Grow, 2004). Furthermore, Grow (2004) wrote, “The trend to acculturate rather than assimilate is even more stark among Latino youth. Today, 97% of Mexican kids whose parents are immigrants and 76% of other Hispanic immigrant children know Spanish, even as nearly 90% also speak English very well, according to a decade-long study by University of California at Irvine sociologist Rubén G. Rumbaut. More striking, those Latino kids keep their native language at four times the rate of Filipino, Vietnamese, or Chinese children of immigrants. ‘Before, immigrants tried to become Americans as soon as possible,’ says Sergio Bendixen, founder of Bendixen & Associates, a polling firm in Coral Gables, Fla., that specializes in Hispanics. ‘Now, it’s the opposite’.”

As a result of this growth and maintenance of the Spanish language, U.S. institutions are scrambling to accommodate this linguistic group. As evidence, the Labor Department and Social

Security Administration are hiring more Spanish-speaking administrators to handle the flow in Spanish speakers into the workforce (Grow, 2004). Additionally, the power language of Spanish is observed in the media.

According to "The State of the News Media 2004 (n.d.), the circulation of Spanish-language dailies has more than tripled since 1990 and ad revenues of Spanish-language dailies have grown more than sevenfold since 1990. In the television media, there are two networks aimed at the Spanish-speaking audience - Telemundo and Univision. Telemundo, the smaller of the two, was launched in 1986 by Saul Steinberg and Henry Silverman of Reliance Capital Group, who believed mainstream outlets were not paying enough attention to the nation's growing Spanish-speaking population. In 1998, Telemundo was sold to Sony for \$539 million, and within four years, 2002, the network was purchased by NBC for \$2.7 billion. Univision, the largest Spanish-language television station, has roots that trace back to 1961 to a small station in San Antonio, came into existence in its current form in 1992, when the network was purchased from Hallmark by a consortium of buyers. When Telemundo sold for \$2.7 billion, some estimated Univision's value to be at least \$8 billion. Since then, Univision has acquired the Hispanic Broadcasting Company's radio group for \$3 billion. According to Wentz (2005), the ads on Univision attracted \$2.7 billion dollars in revenue in 2004. In 2004, two movies appeared at the cinema in Spanish language, *María llena eres de gracia* and *Motorcycle Diaries*, were nominated for 2005 Oscars.

Other markets have stepped up the appeal to Latinos. Grow (2004) indicated that in 2003, Procter & Gamble Co. spent \$90 million on advertising directed at Latinos for 12 products such as Crest and Tide. This amount represented 10% of its ad budget for those brands and a 28% hike in just one year. Procter and Gamble's advertising to Latinos increased significantly after 2000 when the company hired a 65-person dual language team to target Latinos. Interestingly, Gregory (2005) reported that Procter

and Gamble added three scents to Gain detergent based on the fact that 57% of Latinos describe themselves as “avid scent seekers.” In 2004, Gain's sales growth was in the double-digits among the Latino market, outpacing general U.S. sales (Grow, 2004). A few companies have even gone all-Spanish. Many of those include supermarkets such as Kroger and HEB. The supermarket industry has determined that Latinos spend more money and more time in grocery stores than any other ethnic group (Reveron, n.d.), partly due to the family connections that food represents to Latinos.

In the political arena, the Latino population's influence is growing. Bush even opened the past election year with a guest-worker proposal for immigrants that analysts took as a play for the Latino vote. New Mexico Governor Bill Richardson, a Mexican-American, delivered a first-ever Spanish-language version of the Democrat's rebuttal to the 2004 State of the Union address (Grow, 2004). More recently demonstrating the Latino's growing political clout, Los Angeles elected the first Mexican-American Mayor, Antonio Villaraigosa, in 133 years. Noting more Latino presence, President Bush recently appointed Alberto Gonzalez, Mexican-American from Houston, as Attorney General, and Carlos Gutierrez as Secretary of Commerce. Both powerful appointments are poised to shape the future of the American society.

The Hispanicizing of America is upon us with the country's model being more of a salad bowl than a melting pot. As the years progress and the children of the immigrants position themselves in the workworld and in the political arena, major shifts in society are imminent. Up and down periods are expected with fast-growing Latino populations. An example of such a period has already occurred in former California Governor Pete Wilson's 1994 political effort known as Proposition 187, to ban social services to undocumented immigrants. Other efforts such as English-only laws, Proposition 227 in California and Proposition 203 in Arizona, have limited or prohibited schools and government agencies from using Spanish. Such English-only laws have passed in some 18 states. Most of these efforts have

been ineffective as school districts continue with a variety of types of bilingual education programs. Such efforts are likely to be promulgated as the Latino presence maintains and even increases. A final and more recent example, is the Minutemen Project, a seemingly supportive project collaborating with the border patrol to better protect the U.S./Mexican border; however, some from the news media have questioned the motive of such projects.

Challenges Latinos and Schools Face

Today's Latino immigrants and English language learners (ELLs) in the U.S. face a vastly different situation than those who immigrated even just a generation ago. As our society has shifted from an agrarian base to a highly technical society, greater literacy demands have been placed upon students and workers. Much higher levels of English fluency are needed to compete in the U.S. economy; thus high levels of literacy are seen as necessary to improve one's social and economic condition. The situation has become critical as nearly 4.5 million children come to school from families where the home language is other than English (Therrien & Ramirez, 2000). In Texas, alone, over 630,000 students were served in ELL programs in 2002-2003, accounting for almost 15% (14.9%) of the school population (TEA, 2004) with 94% Spanish speakers and 87% of those economically disadvantaged (TEA, 2003). Nationally, in 2001-2002, ELLs comprised 9.64% of the national enrollment in public elementary and secondary schools, and 79% of these students were Spanish speakers (National Center for Education Statistics, 2002). More specifically, the population of ELLs in the U.S. at the middle to secondary schools ranges from >35% at grades 4-8 and approximately 19% at grades 9-12 (Kindler, 2002). The poverty rate among such foreign-born children sits at 39% (Ruíz-de-Velasco, 2000). The dropout rates of these secondary age ELLs is astounding. According to Whitehurst in his speech to the High School Summit (October, 2003), the dropout rate for Hispanics (7.4%) is higher than any other ethnic group (Asian 3.5, White 4.1, Black 6.1), and among those Hispanics are, of

course, the ELLs in large number. Even more pronounced are the numbers from Jamieson, Curry, and Martinez (2001) as they reported that 13 percent of 18- to 24- year olds drop out of school and among those are 34% Hispanic. Compounding the problems of dropouts are the notable graduation rates as reported by the National Center for Education Statistics (2001) are the graduation rates. The Center found that in 2000, for Whites it was at 91% and for Hispanics it was at 64%. One of the prevalent antecedents to high dropout rates is the level of academic achievement. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) race/ethnicity statistics show only 22% of 12th grade Hispanic students, the largest language minority, scoring at or above proficient on the 2002 NAEP Reading Assessment in comparison to White students (44% scored at or above proficient) (National Center for Education Statistics, 2003). In math, only four percent of Hispanic students scored at or above proficient with White students scoring 20% proficient (National Center for Education Statistics, 2001). Most research has focused on ELL program effectiveness and academic achievement at the lower grades (Center for School and District Improvement, 2004), but the glaring statistics raise the flag for researchers, policymakers, and educational leaders to attend to issues of learning at the secondary level.

Socialization

Latino ELLs face several issues related to socialization to the U.S. school system: (a) peer integration with non-Latinos, (b) attitudes toward school work, (c) learning of English, (d) school as a difference learning environment, (e) parental involvement in the school, and (f) teacher induction to the culture.

Peer integration. According to Brittain (2002), Latinos, who have had peers who go back and forth and bring information to the native country, may have (a) negative perceptions of particular groups of students, particularly Black students, (b) fears for their safety due to information related to gang activity, and (c) feelings of insecurity related to their national origin. Kao (2000) found that Latinos perceived their peer as believing they were illegal, while Phinney (1990) indicated that the lack of

ability in the English language led to more discrimination. The Latinos, according to Kao (2000) indicated that they perceived the Black students as having negative feelings toward them.

Attitudes toward school work and the curriculum. Kao (2000) reported that Latinos felt that they were not encouraged to join advanced level classes; further, they felt distressed over school and had a lower self-esteem as a consequence. Such negative attitudes toward school, as indicated by Brittain (2002) could lead to negative attitudes toward school and may create feelings of unpreparedness for moving on to higher education. A consensus in the field suggests that children of Mexican descent have higher levels of depression (Joiner, Perez, Wanger, Berenson, & Marquina, 2001; Roberts, Roberts, & Chen, 1997), compared with Euro-American children. One of the prevalent antecedents to high dropout rates is the levels of academic achievement; however, according to Vernez and Abrahamse (1996) it is difficult to drop out of school when one does not “drop in.” In other words, many of the students do not even enroll in school at the secondary level; they simply begin working in manual labor jobs. The main reason Latinos reported quitting school was to go to work (Shobe, 2003). The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) race/ethnicity statistics show only 22% of 12th grade Latino students, the largest language minority group, scoring at or above proficient on the 1002 NAEP Reading Assessment in comparison to White students (44% scored at or above proficient) (NCES, 2003). In math, only 4% of Latino 12th grade students scored at or above proficient with White students scoring 29% proficient (NCES, 2001). According to a Just Schools California report (2004), ELLs have inequitable access to rigorous coursework with high school counselors lacking the language of the students which limits information provided to ELLs and the information their parents receive about graduation and college requirements. Also, many schools offer an inadequate number of courses designed to meet the needs of their ELLs. As a result, many ELLs have short schedules that do not prepare them, even for graduation. Additionally most classroom teachers have minimal, if any training in meeting the academic or

linguistic needs of their ELL students (Byrnes, Kiher, & Manning, 1997; Youngs & Youngs, 2001).

English language acquisition. According to Brittain (2002), Mexican students come to the U.S. with negative attitudes about their abilities to learn English easily. These students tended to view English proficiency as a major obstacle not only in terms of communication, but also in terms of social relations and inclusion. They experienced English as the language of validation for belonging to the societal structure both in and out of school.

School as a different learning environment. In Mexico and Central America, the school system is very different than in the U.S. For example, in the U.S., the school is a social institution where children are provided books for classroom use, books to check out from the library, breakfast and lunches for free, counseling, nurses on call, free transportation, and physical education. Most of the Mexican students in Brittain's (2002) study indicate that schools in their home country, in general, did not provide such services. She noted, however, that the services provided in the U.S. schools to immigrants did not always equate to what they needed to succeed in the upward mobility of our society.

Parental involvement in schools. In general, Latino parents have been found to have low self-esteem (Hughes et al., 1999; Kelty, 1997; Paratore, et al., 1999). Additionally, Lambourne and Zinn (1993) found that immigrant families may experience culture shock as they navigate within a new culture. Parents from Latino backgrounds need assistance from the school in knowing how to work with their children so that the children can be more successful within the school structure. This needed assistance is based upon Kelty's (1997) work which determined that the Latino culture emphasizes obedience and respect for adult authority, therefore, many parents may communicate in a direct manner with their children rather than engaging them in oral language development and reading. Without instruction on how to encourage children at home, these parents will not be able to build a strong foundation for academic skills. Paratore et al. (1999) indicated that despite limited English proficiency,

low levels of education, and few economic resources, when parents were provided opportunities to learn from and collaborate with teachers, all were willing and able to do so consistently and effectively; this was also supported by Kelty's (1997) study. We have found that such parental involvement programs also assist parents in becoming more acculturated to the school structure and to the U.S. society; additionally, like Valdez (1997), we found that parents value learning English just as much as they value their children learning English.

Teacher induction to the culture. According to a recent study by Karabenick and Clemens Noda (2004), identified 14 knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors that impact regular and bilingual classroom teachers' delivery of quality educational services to ELL students in regular and bilingual settings (A few of their findings are included in parenthetical phrases for each listed.):

1. Teacher efficacy: general and ESL (Teachers in their study had favorable attitudes toward ELLs. They found most teachers believed it was possible to be equally proficient in two languages, they expressed ambivalence with respect to the effect of L1 usage in the home on the speed and efficiency with which ELL learners acquired an second language (L2.)
2. Approaches to teaching: mastery versus performance
3. Second language learning
4. Relationship between language and academic skills (The researchers found that a trend that teachers with more positive attitudes toward ELLs perceived that students' usage of their native language (L1) did not interfere with their acquisition of English or their academic performance. Over half of the teachers in the study indicated that they believed that English fluency might be related to higher order thinking. Results point to teachers' apparent lack of knowledge and, hence, understanding of the relationship between L1 and L2 in the mastery of academic content. This affirms teachers' responses on items of the survey related to second language acquisition, further documenting that many district

teachers may be unable to distinguish between oral communication proficiencies and cognitive academic-language capabilities.)

5. Bilingual bicultural education (Teachers in the study were skeptical about the conclusiveness of research on bilingual education. Most teachers (74%) disagreed that bilingual education means instruction primarily in students' native language, with little instruction in English. There is little doubt that teachers in the study were certain about the advantages of bilingualism.)

6. Assessment of ELLs (Although 82% of the teacher-respondents indicated that some ways of assessing abilities and academic performance may be inappropriate for ELL students. They were uncertain as to whether ELLs should be tested in English or their L1.)

7. ELLs and collaborative instructional approaches

8. ELLs and classroom resources and time on instructional tasks (Sixty-six percent of the teachers believed that ELL students take up more of their time than non-ELL students and that ELL students require no more classroom and other school resources than do non-ELL students.)

9. Interactions between ELL and non-ELL students in the classroom (Forty-six percent of the teachers indicated that ELL students in their buildings are not, or would not, be viewed as problems by other teachers or building administrators; however, 30% did believe that the ELL students are viewed less favorably by building administrators and their fellow teachers, with 24% indicating they were uncertain of the school's perceptions related to ELL students.)

10. Teacher beliefs about ELLs' parents (Most teachers, 76%, did not believe that ELL students' parents who do not speak English after having been in America for a long time are probably incapable of ever mastering English (11% did believe that, and 12% were uncertain). A majority (58%) believed that continuing to speak their L1 and not English was an indication that parents wanted to preserve their L1,

62% of the teachers believed parents of ELL students were less involved in the schools than parents of regular students.)

11. School climate for ELLs

12. Teacher attitudes toward ELLs (Teachers were quite confident in their ability to conduct their classes in ways that help students understand the material, teach their assigned content areas, teach learning strategies to help students master the material, and themselves master what is expected of them.

Teachers were moderately confident in their ability to adapt their instruction so that ELL students could understand the material and help ELLs succeed in their classes, and teachers believed themselves prepared to work with culturally and linguistically diverse students. Additionally, teachers believed themselves significantly less able to teach ELL students than to teach students in general.)

13. General sociocultural attitudes (Teachers overwhelmingly (89%) agreed that cultural differences enrich the lives of community members. Consistently, a majority (62%) also disagreed that people from different cultures inevitably have difficulty living together in harmony. The least consensus was expressed in response to the question of whether cultural and ethnic differences are a barrier to the ability of families to work and socialize together, with 42% in agreement and 35% disagreeing.)

14. Bilingual resources.

According to Brittain (2002), many teachers perceive any performance or effort done in another language not equitable to the merit of doing the same thing in English. In two-way bilingual programs, teachers often viewed immigrant children's accomplishments in Spanish as something not worthy of praise or recognition, since it is done in the native language and is assumed to be an effortless task (Valdes, 1997).

For more than 200 years, the nation has succeeded in weaving the foreign-born into the fabric of U.S. society, incorporating strands of new cultures along the way. With their huge numbers, Hispanics are adding all kinds of new influences. Cinco de Mayo has joined St. Patrick's Day as a public celebration in some neighborhoods, and burritos are everyday fare. More and more, Americans hablan Español. Will Hispanics be absorbed just as other waves of immigrants were? It's possible, but more likely they will continue to straddle two worlds, figuring out ways to remain Hispanic even as they become Americans.

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