

Handbook of
**LATINOS AND
EDUCATION**

Theory, Research, and Practice

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19 Infinite Possibilities, Many Obstacles

Language, Culture, Identity, and Latino/a Educational Achievement

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Overview

The educational achievements of Latino/as have historically lagged behind those of other ethnic and racial groups in the United States. In recent years, the Latino/a population within the United States has undergone dramatic changes: the substantial increase in number, nation-wide dispersion, and relatively young ages of the Latino/a population place the educational achievement of this group at the center of state, national, and international policy. This chapter examines the impact that Latino/a language use and maintenance, cultural practices, and identity formations have on their education. Although many obstacles persist in the pursuit of educational parity, there are also many opportunities and innovative programs contributing to Latino/as' educational success and the enrichment of the field of educational theory and practice to help all students succeed.

For Latino/as, as for many other groups of Color in the United States, educational achievement cannot be conceptualized as an individual process. Context, community, and family form a seamless network leading to educational progress. In the recent past, Latino/a educational trajectories were conceptualized as being determined largely by individual dispositional characteristics such as resilience, mettle, self-efficacy, and resistance to stigma (Close & Solberg, 2008; Phinney, Dennis, & Gutierrez, 2005). These characteristics may help to explain the achievement of extraordinary individuals, students who may be found in all groups in society; but there are always a few individuals who do not fit the norm and are considered outliers. However, the successes of individuals do not help move the average (nor the median) level of achievement for Latino/as forward. This is an essential component, especially as the group becomes the numerical majority in many states and school districts (U.S. Census Bureau, 2007; Fry, 2007; Gonzales, 2007). The question then becomes, what structural issues need to be addressed for large numbers of Latino/a students to succeed and substantially increase the overall level of achievement throughout the educational pipeline? In this chapter we examine three areas of research that may provide some guidance in answering the question of how to increase the educational achievement of Latinos: language, culture, and identity. By educational achievement, we specifically mean reducing the dropout rate and increasing the number of high school graduates and the number of Latino/as who attend college and graduate and professional schools.

A Brief Overview of the Educational Status of Latinos

The educational achievements of Latino/as have been steadily increasing since the 1970s, an era when the participation of Latino/as in higher education was an anomaly. The progress along the educational pathways, however, has not kept pace with the growing Latino/a population. As Latino/as have become the majority population in many K-12 school systems, most notably in Texas and California (the most populous states in the country), they still graduate from high

school at much lower rates. Figure 19.2 presents a snapshot of the educational attainment for every 100 school-age Latino/a students who finish high school (in 2003 Asian men, 73 African American men, 63 African American women and 70 Native American men). These rates also affect the college-going rates. Only 4.4 Latino men out of every 100 in the group obtain graduate degrees, followed by White men at 11.1.

It is also important to note that the graduation rates are lower for Puerto Ricans. The most educationally successful group is followed by Puerto Ricans with graduation rates as high as 11.1. Educational success is also a function of immigration and acculturation. The economic oppression and social stigmatization of long-term immigrants to the United States

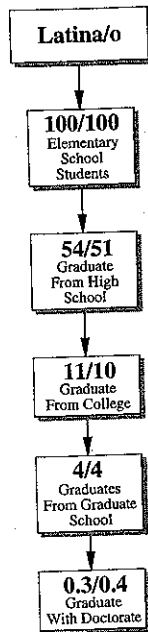


Figure 19.1 The U.S. Department of Education, O., Malagon, M. C. Transitions in the Educational Pipeline. Report Number 7.

school at much lower rates than do Whites, Asians, and African Americans. Figures 19.1 and 19.2 present a snapshot of the educational pipeline in the United States. As Figure 19.1 indicates, for every 100 school children that begin first grade, only 54 Latina women and 51 Latino men finish high school (in comparison to 84 White women and 83 White men, 78 Asian women and 83 Asian men, 73 African American women and 71 African American men, 72 Native American women and 70 Native American men). Not surprisingly, the low rates in high school graduation also affect the college graduation rates for Latino/as; only 11 Latina women and 10 Latino men graduate from college, the lowest rates of all ethnic and racial groups. The most dramatic underrepresentation for Latino/as is seen in the graduate school rates, with only 4.3 Latina women and 4.4 Latino men out of 100 first-graders obtaining graduate or doctoral degrees. The most likely group to obtain graduate and doctoral degrees are Asian men (26.4) and Asian women (14.4) followed by White men (12.4) and White women (8.6).

It is also important to note that the educational progress of Latino/as varies by national origin. The most educationally successful Latino/a group is the Cuban population (see Figure 19.2), followed by Puerto Ricans and Dominicans; these groups have greater high school and college graduation rates as well as higher rates of obtaining graduate and doctoral degrees. The least educationally successful are Salvadorians and Chicano/as.¹ The uneven distribution of educational achievement among different Latino/a groups is largely attributable to the different modes of immigration and incorporation into the United States. Puerto Ricans and Mexicans endured colonization of their homelands, which has been accompanied by cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic oppression. New arrivals in the United States from these groups inherit the disadvantaged status of long-time residents. Dominicans and Salvadorians are more recent immigrants to the United States, mostly arriving in the late 1970s and 80s and joining predominantly urban

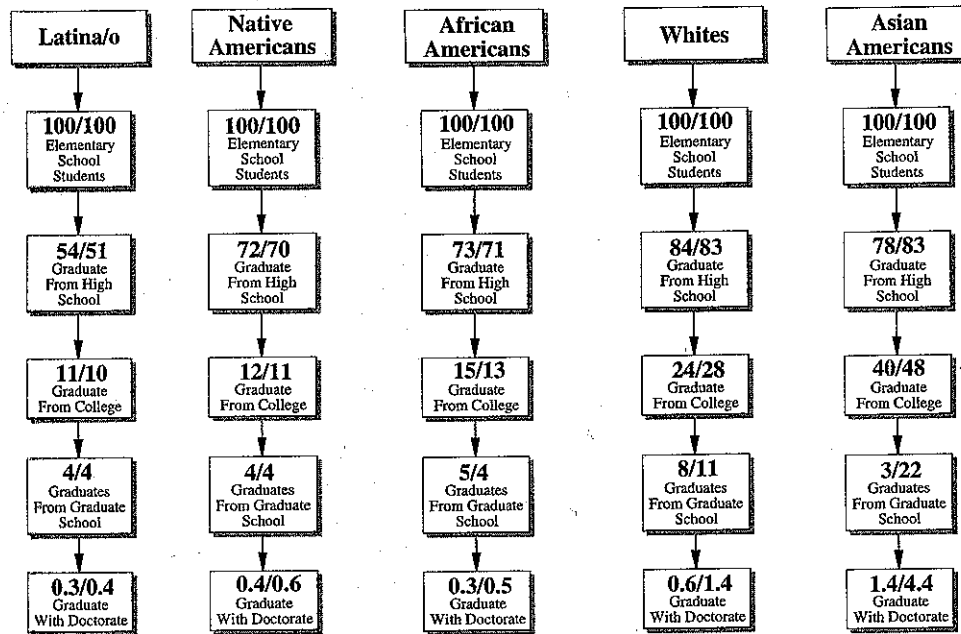


Figure 19.1 The U.S. educational pipeline, by race/ethnicity and gender, 2000. From: Huber, L. P., Huidor, O., Malagon, M. C., Sanchez, G., & Solorzano, D. G. (2006, March). Falling through the cracks: Critical transitions in the Latina/o educational pipeline. 2006 Latina/o Education Summit Report. CSRC Research Report, Number 7. Los Angeles: UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center.

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Other ethnic groups in the United States show a wide dispersion in educational achievement. Further examination of the data reveals that the educational attainment of Latino/as is significantly lower than that of other ethnic groups, and that this difference is due to a combination of factors, including the historical and social context of their communities.

Research on educational achievement among different ethnic groups in the United States has shown that the educational attainment of Latino/as is significantly lower than that of other ethnic groups. This is due to a combination of factors, including the historical and social context of their communities, as well as the educational system's failure to provide adequate support and resources for these students.

In the 1970s, an era of progress along a population, most notably from high

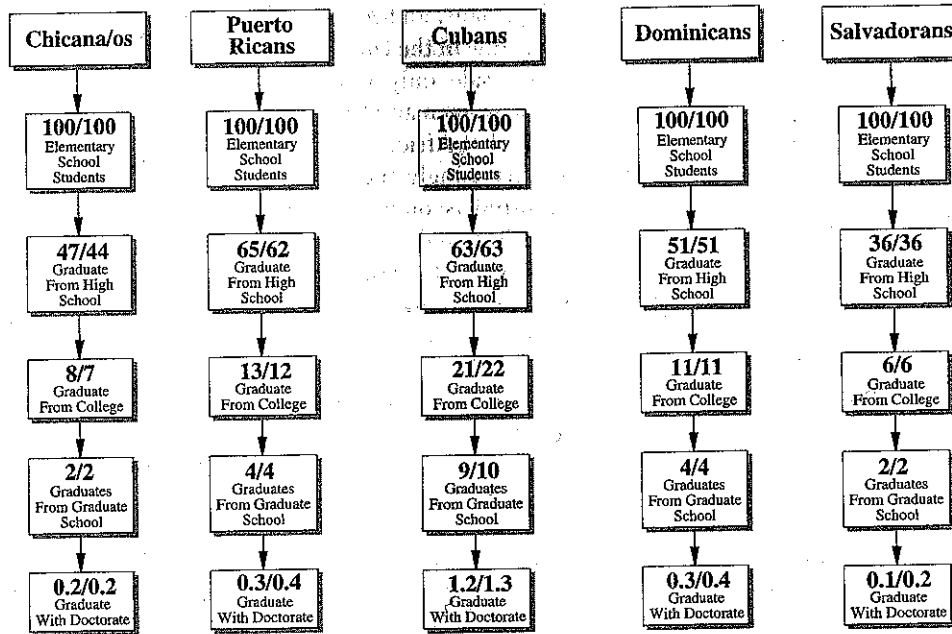


Figure 19.2 The U.S. educational pipeline, by subgroup and gender, 2000. From: Huber, L. P., Huidor, O., Malagon, M. C., Sanchez, G., & Solorzano, D. G. (2006, March). Falling through the cracks: Critical transitions in the Latina/o educational pipeline. 2006 Latina/o Education Summit Report. CSRC Research Report. Number 7. Los Angeles: UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center.

job markets, bypassing the traditional rural job markets that have been the starting point for many Mexican immigrants.

Conversely, the economic and educational trajectories of Cubans have been influenced by the initial experience of arriving in the United States as political refugees after the Marxist/socialist revolution led by Fidel Castro in the 1950s. The original cohort of political Cuban exiles was middle class, both in wealth and in education, and predominantly of White European ancestry. There have been subsequent, albeit smaller, waves of Cuban exiles, most notably in the 1980s with the arrival of the *Marielitos*, who were largely of African ancestry and not as prosperous as the initial cohort. The Cuban exiles also had the advantage of settling, for the most part, in Miami, Florida, a concentrated geographical area, which allowed them to form their own economic institutions, use their educational and social capital to form successful businesses, and eventually have a strong voice in local politics. Given the disparate economic and educational status among the Latino subgroups, an analysis of the educational trajectories of Latino/as must take into account the historical diversity of these national groups. For example, Cubans arriving to the United States as political refugees with educational, social, and cultural capital in contrast to the colonization experiences of Puerto Ricans and Mexican descendants, results in different educational trajectories and outcomes. The complexities of these different forms of incorporation into U.S. society must be an integral part of the analysis in understanding Latinos' educational trajectories.

The Cost of Not Educating Latino/as

The education of Latino/as is certainly a social justice issue; solving this issue would contribute to educational equity. However, also important are the economic consequences of not educating

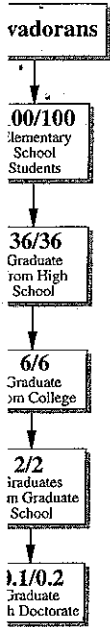
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this population. Increasingly, a degree beyond high school has become necessary for gainful employment. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, 9 of the 15 occupations that will experience substantial growth between the years 2004 and 2014 (i.e., increases of at least twice that of the national average) will require an associate's degree or higher (Gonzales, 2007; Immigration Policy Center, 2007). As Figure 19.3 indicates, in the year 2000 only 4% of Latino/as 25 years of age and older had obtained a bachelor's degree although, as the most recent census figures indicate, they represent 15% of the population (Huber, Huidor, Malagon, Sanchez, & Solorzano, 2006). Obviously, Latinos' chances in the current and future job market will be affected by their lack of advanced degrees (Huber, Huidor, Malagon, Sanchez, & Solorzano, 2006).

At the opposite end of the spectrum from Latino/as are Asians and Whites; both of these groups are above population parity in their educational achievement. Whereas Whites represent 79% of the population, 84% of those 25 and older have obtained a bachelor's degree. Similarly, Asians in the same age group represent 4% of the population but 6% have received a college degree. These population comparisons are important. Thirty years ago, the educational progress of Latino/as, although of some concern, was not tied to the success or failure of the overall economy. Latino/as in the 1960s and 70s were primarily a numerical minority confined to low-wage and low-skill jobs. At that time, educating Latino/as was largely a social justice issue, not an economic imperative (Hurtado, Haney, & Garcia, 1998). The changing demographics have reframed the terms of the education debate. Latino/as are now the largest non-White group in the United States, having surpassed African Americans in number. Equally important is the fact that Latino/as are now the youngest population in the United States; they will be largely responsible for generating future taxes to support the social security of an aging White population (Hayes-Bautista, 2004). Furthermore, Latino/as have, on average, more children than do other ethnic and racial groups in the United States. As such, they stand to grow as a population, coupled with a steady flow of immigration from all of Latin America. As predicted by sociologist David Hayes-Bautista, in California, where the majority of Latino/as reside, it can be expected that

in the fall of 2013, the majority of children entering the state's high schools will be Latino. In the fall of 2016, the majority of new workers entering the labor force will be Latino. By 2019, the majority of young people who have turned 18 and are eligible to register and vote will be Latino. (Ferraes, 2003)

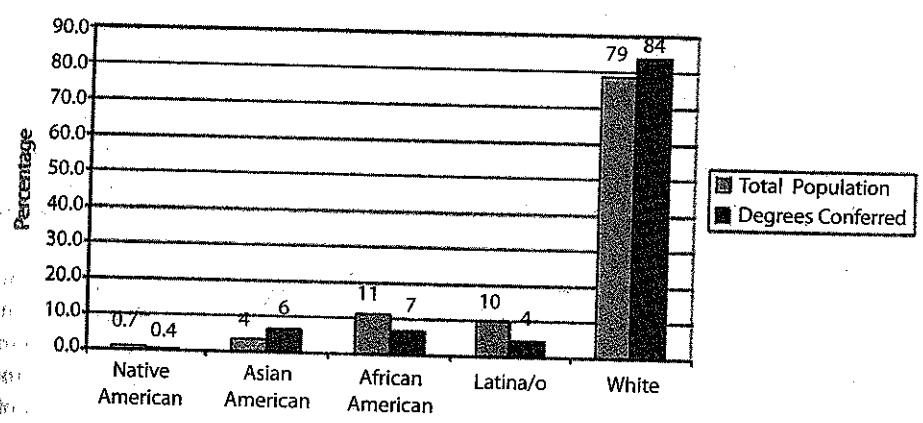


Figure 19.3 Percentage of students, aged twenty-five and older, attaining a bachelor's degree, by race/ethnicity, 2000. From: Huber, L. P., Huidor, O., Malagon, M. C., Sanchez, G., & Solorzano, D. G. (2006, March). Calling through the cracks: Critical transitions in the Latina/o educational pipeline. 2006 Latina/o Education Summit Report. CSRC Research Report. Number 7. Los Angeles: UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center.

Not educating Latino/as at a rate that reaches parity with their population places the U.S. economy, as well as other institutions, including education, at risk.

In drawing an accurate picture of Latino/as in the U.S. educational system, it is important to note the disparity in population sizes among different Latino/a groups. Of the 45.5 million Latino/as in the United States, 64% (29 million) of the Latino/a origin population is of Mexican descent, 9% (4 million) of Puerto Rican descent, 3.5% (1.5 million) of Cuban descent, 3% (1.3 million) of Salvadorian descent, and 2.7% (1.2 million) of Dominican descent. The remainder hail from other Central American, South American, or other Latino/a origins (U.S. Census Bureau, 2007, 2008). Equally important is each group's geographical location within the United States. Whereas roughly one half of the nation's Dominicans live in New York City, and about half of the nation's Cubans live in Miami-Dade County, Latino/as of Mexican descent are dispersed throughout the country. Although the majority of the Mexican descent population resides in the southwestern United States, there are sizeable segments of Mexican descendants in the Midwest and Southern United States, and, most recently, in the Northeast, including New York City (U.S. Census Bureau, 2006a). The sheer number of Mexican descendants and their geographical dispersion make them an essential part of the current and future work force. Consequently, their educational success will have a major impact on the economic and social future of this country.

We now turn to the three areas of research—language, culture, and identity—that have substantially impacted the educational trajectories of Latino/as in the United States. We review the research in each of these areas and analyze the effect these conditions have on Latino/as' educational achievement.

Language

In 2007, the United States joined China and India as countries with populations in excess of 300 million people (the U.S. population is 301,621,157). Latino/as represent 15% (45.5 million) of the total U.S. population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2006a, 2006b, 2008), making people of Latino/a descent the nation's largest ethnic and racial minority (this estimate does not include the 4 million residents of Puerto Rico [U.S. Census Bureau, 2008]). When applying the U.S. Census Bureau definition of linguistic isolation where "the dominant language at home is a non-English language, and that no one in the family speaks English at a fluency level greater than 'well'" (Verdugo, 2006, p. 7), 1 in 5 Latino/as in the United States report that they do not speak English or do not speak English "well." According to Verdugo, 26.28% of Latino/as in 2004 were linguistically isolated. Verdugo further refined the analysis by only examining Latino/as in households where Spanish is the dominant language; the percentage of linguistic isolation increases to 33.17%.

The use and maintenance of Spanish within Latino/a families produces many consequences for the children coming from these households. Given the statistics on the use of Spanish, limited English fluency, and linguistic isolation, a substantial number of Latino/a first-graders begin school with little or no knowledge of English (Capps, Fix, & Murray, 2005; Garcia, 1994). For many students, their lack of English language skills becomes cumulative, making it difficult for them to catch up on the academic skills they missed because of their limited fluency in English (Gándara, 2006). The academic disadvantage becomes especially pronounced in mathematics and the sciences where training needs to begin relatively early in a child's schooling (Gándara, 2006). Furthermore, because a second language in general, and Spanish in particular, is not perceived as an asset, even students who manage to acquire English quickly enough to succeed in school are never rewarded or acknowledged for having such a valuable language skill.

Beyond the individual consequences of not speaking English, there is also a serious gap between the home language and the language spoken in schools that permeates the entire context of schooling (Garcia, 1994, 2001). For instance, the lack of English fluency of many Latino/a

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parents limits their participation in their children's schooling. They often are unable to help students with homework, do not feel comfortable participating in school activities, and ultimately are unable to adequately advocate for their children in their schools (Zarate, 2007).

Many Latino/as come from families where Spanish is the primary language. The prevalence of Spanish in the home and community is likely to persist primarily for two reasons. First, Latino/as have a deep commitment to language maintenance, exemplified in the number that report preferring to speak Spanish at home, even when they are fluent in English. Currently there are 34 million U.S. residents 5 years and older who speak Spanish at home; of those, more than one half say they speak English very well (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008). Second, as stated earlier, Latino/as are a substantial segment of the U.S. population, making Spanish persistence even greater. Under these circumstances, it becomes incumbent on schools to restructure their activities and to be more responsive to the increasing number of Latino/a immigrants who are Spanish dominant.

There are many small-scale, inventive programs responding to these changing demographics. One example is the *Abriendo Puertas* (Opening Doors) program established in 2003 by Texas A&M University's College of Agriculture and Life Sciences. The program, developed by Dr. Ida Acuña-Garza, teaches parent volunteers the instrumental knowledge necessary for students to apply to and enter college. The structured curriculum is administered to an initial cohort of parents in middle and high schools. In turn, these parents visit other parents in their communities to spread the word about the requirements necessary to successfully finish high school and apply to college. The program has been very successful in San Antonio, Houston, and other communities in South Texas, as well as in the Tri-Cities Area in Washington State. The parent volunteers participating in *Abriendo Puertas* do not fit the profile of parent volunteers in mainstream educational intervention programs: their schools have 50% high school drop-out rates; they are predominantly Latinas (98% women); they are first-generation or undocumented U.S. immigrants; they live below the poverty level, with many having a household income of less than \$10,000 a year; and they do not have a high school diploma (<http://tamusystem.tamu.edu/systemwide/06/10/features/openingdoors.html>). Nonetheless, the program in these sites has successfully recruited parent volunteers, as well as a cadre of parents in these communities, to contribute to their children's educational success.

A further development in this area is to redefine parental engagement in education beyond the usual measures of participation in parent-teacher conferences, attendance at PTA meetings, and volunteering in the classroom. More inclusive measures should include parent participation in cultural activities in which Latino parents may feel more comfortable (Zarate, 2007). For example, providing support for folkloric dance troupes and mariachi musical groups can be especially effective in increasing parent participation (Hurtado, 1997; Hurtado & Gurin, 2004). Such innovations promise to be more attractive to Spanish-speaking parents by increasing their comfort level in participating in their children's schooling.

In spite of the hurdles many Spanish-speaking children encounter in their schooling, eventually most Latino/a students do acquire English. It is also worthwhile to note that regardless of the high rates in Spanish prevalence, children born in the United States to immigrant parents and children brought to this country before the age of 12 experience high levels of English acquisition. However, because their native language is not supported within the education system, the transition to English is often traumatic and affects their academic achievement (Gándara, 2006).

Undocumented Students

Closely tied to language use is immigration status. First-generation immigrants are more likely to use Spanish as their primary language, as are their children, slowing down the children's educational progress. Furthermore, the educational level attained is closely tied to Spanish use

and immigrant status such that lack of English skills results in limited employment opportunities for immigrants. The issue of language isolation is a primary concern among adult immigrants as most of their children acquire English. For younger immigrants, the acquisition of English happens rather rapidly although Spanish is not abandoned. For immigrants and their children to succeed educationally, they must have opportunities to acquire English quicker and integrate Spanish-dominant parents into their children's educational process. The quicker the linguistic integration of immigrant parents, the more their children are likely to benefit educationally.

Of special concern are the children of undocumented immigrants who may be undocumented themselves. According to a recent report, U.S. high schools graduate approximately 65,000 undocumented immigrant students every year. These students, for the most part, are brought to the United States as young children and have grown up attending K-12 schools in this country (Lazarin, 2007). They may achieve extraordinary educational heights but are often unable to pursue higher education because of restrictions placed on financial aid to attend colleges and universities. A major breakthrough to provide educational opportunities to undocumented students was the federal legislation commonly referred to as the DREAM Act (Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors), a bipartisan bill that would restore states' rights to offer in-state tuition to immigrant students residing in the state. The sticking point in this piece of legislation, which ultimately led to its defeat, was a provision that presented a pathway to citizenship. A substantial number of law makers felt the bill would reward undocumented students for "breaking the law," although, of course, the students had no control over their parents' decision to enter the country without documentation. With the defeat of this legislation, undocumented students are subjected to out-of-state tuitions and financial aid ineligibility. In 2007 the DREAM Act was reintroduced in Congress as part of the comprehensive immigration legislation; it failed once again to pass the U.S. Senate. Nevertheless, the DREAM Act remains viable because of bipartisan support and the backing of the House and Senate leadership. The failure of this piece of legislation to pass is yet another obstacle to many talented Latino/a youth on their path to higher education (National Immigration Law Center, 2007).²

Culture

Most educational researchers agree that Latino/as have both cultural similarities and differences based on their countries of origin and their histories in the United States (Trumbull, Rothstein-Fisch, Greenfield, & Quiroz, 2001). As stated earlier, of all the Latino/a nationalities, Latino/as of Mexican ancestry are the largest group and have had the longest presence in the United States, dating to even before this country became a nation. In particular, Mexican-ancestry Latino/as have a unique connection to the southwestern United States because of their history of colonization and strong cultural ties, evidenced in the names of the towns and cities located there (Verdugo, 2006). In addition, many cultural practices deriving from the Spanish and Mexican colonial past are still evident in many Western states such as Arizona, California, Colorado, New Mexico, and Texas.

Other Latino/a groups also have specific historical and political trajectories that result in unique relationships with U.S. mainstream culture. For example, Puerto Ricans are U.S. citizens who are allowed to vote in presidential primaries but not in presidential elections. Furthermore, Puerto Rico lacks official representation in the U.S. House of Representatives and Senate despite island residents' long history of migration to New York, which has consequences for cultural adaptation as Puerto Ricans experience increasing visibility in all areas of social life in the United States. Similarly, the historical uniqueness of Cuban immigration to this country as a result of the Cuban revolution positions Cubans in alliance with conservative political forces in the United States. The large numbers of Cubans in Florida, and their educational and social capital, have given rise to political and social power, which, in turn, has made their cultural

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adaptations different from that of other Latino/a immigrant groups who generally came to the United States seeking employment opportunities rather than as political refugees united against the communist take-over of their native homeland.

While this discussion of the intrinsic cultural, social, political, and economic diversity of different Latino/a groups represents a very cursory overview of the cultural complexity of the Latino/a population in the United States, it serves to highlight the broad spectrum of differences among the Latino/a populace. Such diversity must be addressed by the school system as a whole to insure Latino/a children do not fall behind as they progress through the educational system.

The Changing U.S. Cultural Landscape

With the advent of multicultural education in the 1990s and the continuing diversity movement in higher education, many educators are now convinced that the cultural and linguistic assimilation strategies proposed prior to this era are no longer viable, or even desirable (Banks, 1995; Giroux, 1983; hooks, 1994). Instead, the conversation has shifted to identify new strategies necessary to incorporate different cultures and languages throughout the schooling process (McLaren, 1997). This is obviously good news for the many Latino/a students and their parents who are dedicated to educational success but who may not have the knowledge or tools to succeed in the education system. One point of entry for implementing this new point of view on cultural diversity is to increase the number of Latino/a teachers and, at the same time, finding strategies for transculturating non-Latino/a teachers to be more responsive to the increasing number of Latino/a students.

The diversification of the teaching work force is especially relevant. In California, where the greatest number of Latino/as reside, of the K-12 teachers in 2004–2005, 72.1% were White, 14.5% were Hispanic, 4.5% were African American, and 4.6% were Asian (the remaining teachers were of various ethnicities and races; California Department of Education, 2007). In fact, the California figures fare better in terms of percentage of Latino/a to non-Latino teachers than the national figures do. In 2004, there were a total of 6.2 million K-12 teachers in the United States; 83.2% were White, 8.4% were African American, 5.5% were Hispanic, and 2.9% were Asian (also, 71% were women; U.S. Census Bureau, 2004; California Department of Education, 2007). The less-experienced, non-credentialed teachers were the most likely educators to be found in the poor schools with large numbers of students of Color (Oakes et al., 2006). In urban areas, where most Latino/as reside, 80% of the 54 largest urban districts had non-credentialed teachers on their staff (Urban Teachers Collaborative, 2000). As Verdugo (2006) points out, “Hispanic students do not, generally, get qualified teachers” (p. 31). Specifically, non-credentialed teachers, who are not teaching within their areas of expertise and who lack extensive teaching experience, predominantly teach Latino/a students. To their credit, many teachers express their desire to have more diversity training to deal with the increasing number of Latino/a students and other students of Color. Unfortunately, there is no national policy, or even a state policy, that addresses increasing the cultural competencies of all teachers to deal with the changing demographics (Verdugo, 2006).

The lack of a diverse teaching force is also a concern because the Latino/a population is not only growing in the five southwestern states, it is also dispersing demographically in significant numbers throughout the country. Although 45% of Latino/as still reside in two regions of the United States—the West and the South—in 2004 the five states with the greatest number of Latino/as were California, Texas, Florida, New York, and Illinois (Verdugo, 2006). Latino/as have moved to regions of the country where they can find employment that does not require an educational degree (e.g., the service sector in Las Vegas, the meat and poultry industry in the Midwest, and the fish canning industry along the East Coast). Latino/as are usually concentrated within defined communities in these regions (e.g., Dalton, Georgia, where there is a

revitalized carpet industry). They also seek areas where they can find low-cost housing (Durand & Massey, 2003). Consequently, these small communities may rather suddenly receive a large number of Latino/a students, forcing school personnel to scurry and find solutions for the newly arrived students who do not fit their usual profile (Verdugo, 2006).

Cultural Diversity as an Asset

Many scholars have begun to outline the aspects of cultural diversity that are helpful for students of Color to navigate the systems of education (Gurin, Nagda, & Lopez, 2004; Saenz, Ngai, & Hurtado, 2007). For some, Latino/a students and other students of Color bring funds of knowledge that have not been recognized as valuable by schools or standardized forms of assessments (Gonzalez & Moll, 2002; Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992; Vélez-Ibáñez & Greenberg, 1992). In addition to advocating rigorous training of Latino/a students from an early age (Gándara, 2006), some scholars also recognize that the skills provided by poor, Spanish-dominant, immigrant families are valuable and worth reinforcing in school curricula as well as in the reconceptualization of education in general (Carreón, Drake, & Barton, 2005; Lopez, Scribner, & Mahitivanichcha, 2001; Ramirez, 2003). For example, Tara Yosso (2005) argues that students of Color in general and Latino/a students in particular bring various forms of "community capital wealth" to their schooling that include "aspirational, navigational, social, linguistic, familial and resistant capital" (p. 69).

In her theoretical discussion, Yosso (2005) critiques scholars who apply Pierre Bourdieu's theories to propose that only the upper and middle classes can provide the kind of knowledge and skills that constitute valuable capital toward succeeding in school and in life in general. From this perspective, it would seem that Latino/as are lacking in the "social capital" necessary to succeed in school, and that all educational interventions should be directed at bringing these students up to par by instructing them in hegemonic knowledges, ignoring the assets they may bring to their schooling. Instead, Yosso (2005) proposes there are at least six areas or skills (as outlined below) that Latino/as and other students of Color (and we would add other non-traditional students, such as re-entry students and students from poor backgrounds) bring to bear on their education. *Aspirational capital* is the ability of a student to maintain hopes and dreams for the future even in the "face of real and perceived barriers" (p. 77). *Linguistic capital* includes a student's "intellectual and social skills attained through communication experiences in more than one language and/or style" (p. 78). This ability extends to communicating and navigating various social systems and class and social hierarchies. For example, linguistic capital includes the skill bilingual children use to translate for their parents when dealing with institutions such as the government and the medical establishment. *Familial capital* refers to the student's "cultural knowledges nurtured among *familia* (kin) that carry a sense of community history, memory and cultural intuition" (p. 79). Closely related to familial capital is *social capital*, which is a student's knowledge of the social networks of people and the community resources available to them given the embeddedness of their neighborhoods and their extended, many times, transnational families. Their existence in multiple worlds also facilitates the development of *navigational capital*, the student's ability to maneuver through social institutions (Padilla, 1999). Finally, many Latino/a students negotiate multiple social systems as they traverse from homes, to schools, neighborhoods, and, at times, different countries. Through this social knowledge, the arbitrary nature of social and political rules, as well as the unfair practices of many social institutions, is exposed. Yosso (2005) hypothesizes that these experiences lead to *resistant capital*—that is, a student's knowledges and skills fostered through "oppositional behavior that challenges inequality" (p. 80).

Obviously, the educational system would look dramatically different if these kinds of community cultural wealth were fully recognized and integrated into curricula, teaching practices,

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and pedagogies. Equally important, the students (i.e., the non-Latino students) who do not have such community cultural wealth would also benefit from being educated beyond the existing curricula and dominant knowledge, especially given our increasingly globalized world requiring skills to communicate and function across differences. Some institutions of higher education are recognizing the need to transculturate students to "dialogue across difference" by providing small spaces where they can learn to speak to others unlike them (Gurin & Nagda, 2006; Nagda & Gurin, 2007; Zuñiga, Nagda, Chesler, & Cytron-Walker, 2007). Other scholars advocate the integration of indigenous knowledges and spirituality into our existing pedagogies to deepen the transmission of knowledge (Rendón, 2008). This innovative integration of various cultural assets into the educational process promises to be the new frontier in teaching and education.

Identity

The heterogeneity of the Latino/a population based on their varied histories, national origins, and reasons for U.S. immigration, as well as the numerous modes of incorporation into the nation, are amply manifested in the diversity of their identifications. Most Latino/a groups have a deep attachment to the nation-specific label that denotes their origin: Mexican American, Puerto Rican, Cuban American, Salvadorian, Honduran. There is also internal diversity within each national group denoting different cultural and political adaptations to their subordinate status in the United States. For example, the terms *Chicana/o* and *Boricua* highlight the "in-between" status of ethnic and racial groups that endured colonization by the United States and incorporation of their native lands after wars and treaties; for Chicano/as, U.S. rule was imposed through political treaties in 1848 at the end of the Mexican American War, and for Boricuas, in 1898 at the end of the Spanish American War. Latino/as who use the ethnic labels *Chicano/as* and *Boricuas* are making the statement that they are neither fully accepted as members in the United States nor in their countries of ancestry. Instead, their identities, language, and culture are a hybrid of both the United States and their countries of origin. Furthermore, individuals who identify with these political terms reject cultural and linguistic assimilation into the U.S. mainstream and instead seek to create a third culture through the hybridization of their ancestries and their status as residents (and at times citizens) of the United States.

With the tremendous increase in immigration from Latin America, however, individual national groups have had to choose an ethnic label that will benefit them in their struggle to gain political, social, and economic recognition in the United States. The labels for Latino/a panethnic identity vary by region (Oboler, 1995). For example, on the East Coast, Hispanic is the preferred panethnic label of many Latino/a ancestry individuals, while on the West Coast Latino/a is the most widely used term. These panethnic labels, however, are not yet tied to a new ethnic group that has indeed emerged from the intermarriage and co-mingling of different Latino/a cultures and language. In many ways, Latino/a panethnicity is a meta-identity that is deployed for political, social, and economic recognition of a variety of Latino/a groups, with the largest group being of Mexican ancestry, followed by Puerto Ricans and Cuban Americans. Other Central American groups, like Guatemalans and Salvadorians, are smaller in number. Regardless of the internal diversity and lack of amalgamation of these different groups, the political, social, and especially educational realities they face have much in common, making the panethnic label of Latino/a real in its consequences. Also, the similarities in culture and language across Latin America are such that the panethnic label is based on commonalities sufficiently powerful to warrant its use.

Identity and Achievement

There is a long-standing debate in the social science literature on whether students of Color identifying with their ethnic and racial group leads to negative consequences for their educational

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engagement. Among the concerns documented in the literature is that strong ingroup identification with ethnicity and race leads students to disidentify with educational achievement (Ogbu, 1978, 1991, 1993); creates stereotype threat, impairing educational performance (Steele, 1997); and impairs the positive self-esteem necessary to succeed in school. There is also research documenting that adherence to particular ethnic identities does not have an effect on the educational success of Mexican-descent college students, as measured by their college grade point average (Hurtado, García, Vega, & Gonzalez, 2003). Instead, these students' identification with being a parent and a good student predicted their college grades. Other research has documented that the maintenance of culture (Pease-Alvarez, 2002), ethnic identity, and bilingual skills results in higher educational achievement than for Latino/as that lose their cultural distinctiveness. For example, Feliciano (2001) used U.S. Census data from 1990 to examine high school dropout rates among 18- to 21-year-old youth in Asian groups (Vietnamese, Koreans, Chinese, Filipinos, and Japanese) and Latino/a groups (Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, and Cubans). She concludes that:

bilingual students are less likely to drop out than English-only speakers, students in bilingual households are less likely to drop out than those in English-dominant or English-limited households, and students in immigrant households are less likely to drop out than those in nonimmigrant households. These findings suggest that those who enjoy the greatest educational success are not those who have abandoned their ethnic cultures and are most acculturated. Rather, bicultural youths who can draw resources from both the immigrant community and mainstream society are best situated to enjoy educational success. (p. 856)

Feliciano's (2001) findings of the positive aspects of ethnic cultures (as measured by language use and the presence of immigrants in the household) may be explained by the increasing acceptance of cultural diversity in U.S. society in general and in schools in particular. There is still much to be done to fully implement multicultural education at every level of schooling but we cannot overlook the increasing cultural diversification that is now becoming commonplace in U.S. society and in the world.

New Directions for Improving Education for all Students

In the effort to expand the educational achievements of Latino/as, educational practices and educational institutions can also be analyzed to improve the general education of all students. Although improving educational achievement for Latino/as has predominantly been approached as solving a "social problem," many of the successful interventions and innovations in the K-12 system and in higher education can also be perceived as good educational practices for all students. Below we provide only two of many examples to illustrate how a paradigm shift may make these innovations worthwhile for *all* students although they were developed to help Latino/as succeed educationally.

The Use of Spanish as an Asset Rather than a Deficit

In the not too distant past, Spanish use by Latino/a (predominantly Mexican) students in schools was physically punished by school staff. Hurtado and Rodriguez (1989) report that schools in South Texas communities had various strategies to dissuade students from using Spanish on the school premises, including imposing fines, ordering lap runs, issuing after-school detention for repeat offenders, and, in some occasions even taping students' mouths closed. These actions took place in the early 1980s; although there have been no follow-up studies since then, it is highly unlikely that in this era of increasing multicultural education these actions would be perceived as desirable.

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Ironically, at the same time that students were punished for speaking Spanish, enormous resources were invested in instructing students to learn a second language as part of the high school curriculum (a requirement that is still necessary for eligibility to attend college). Many Latino/a parents who feared for the educational success of their children stopped speaking Spanish in their children's presence, and many of these children grew up either not having language skills in Spanish or with receptive bilingualism—that is, the ability to understand but not speak Spanish.

Latino/as' linguistic adaptations are negotiated within this history of coercive language policies. As a result, many Latino/a students grow up in households with different "linguistic bands," which Hurtado & Vega (2004) define as the "different levels of language use and exposure" from "only Spanish to only English, and the continuum in between" (p. 140). For a linguistic band to exist, there must be at least two or more people in the household who speak the same language. The exposure to different languages can also take place through different language media, be it visual like television, books, newspapers, and magazines, or audio like radio and recorded music, as well as the World Wide Web. When parents speak Spanish to each other, children may learn to understand Spanish (receptive bilingualism) but not to speak it. However, when they enter college, many of these students learn to speak Spanish at a much faster rate than if they had never been exposed to the language. Educational institutions could take advantage of this overt and latent cultural and linguistic knowledge, cultivating it to blossom into full English/Spanish bilingualism with equivalent skills in both languages (Garcia, 2001). Given the increasing Latino/a population, Spanish/English bilingualism will be desirable as well as necessary in many economic and social arenas of American life.

Increasing the Participation of Parents throughout the Educational Cycle

Educational achievement is usually conceptualized as occurring in a linear fashion from parents to their offspring; that is, parents are responsible for providing the educational opportunities and resources for children to succeed in school. Furthermore, the degree of direct parental involvement decreases as children begin pre-school, enter elementary school, go on to middle school, and graduate from high school. Usually at the high school level, many parents who can afford the costs enlist experts to tutor their children in difficult subjects like chemistry and advanced math courses. Once students are ready to apply for college, many families are willing to pay "coaches" to oversee the college application process. By the time students attend higher education, they are solely responsible for navigating their education, consulting parents only occasionally on crucial decisions like selecting a major or deciding on graduate or professional school.

The typical trajectory for Latino/a students is somewhat different. Many of the educational decisions made by Latino/a students are not based solely on their individual concerns. The family unit (with many variations as to whom is included in this constellation) becomes central in making educational decisions. Furthermore, the more involved and knowledgeable Latino/a families are about their children's schooling, the more supportive they tend to be (Hurtado, 2003). Several innovative programs have capitalized on this tendency. As mentioned earlier, the program *Abriendo Puertas* (Opening Doors) uses parent volunteers to spread the word about college requirements and involve parents in other ways as well. For example, the program facilitates parents' becoming an integral part of the milestones in their children's education, like graduation from middle school, potluck dinners for students' acceptance into college, and certificates to parents who complete the *Abriendo Puertas* training. These events create a sense of community and cohesion between parents, students, and schools.

Similarly, the Hispanic Mother-Daughter Program (HMDP) takes advantage of the natural alliance many Latina mothers have with their daughters, which has been documented in the

research literature (Hurtado, 2003; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 1995). HMDP is directed under the auspices of Student Affairs at Arizona State University. The stated mission of the program is to "increase the number of first generation Hispanic women who complete a bachelor's degree by directly involving the mothers in the educational process of their daughters" (www.asu.edu/studentaffairs/mss/msc/docs/WEB%20Parent%20Recruitment.pdf). The program begins when the students are in seventh grade and continues until the students graduate from college (most of the students attend Arizona State University). The mother-daughter teams attend nine workshops per year covering topics ranging from self-empowerment, to developing leadership skills, to instruction on the courses necessary to attend college. The mother-daughter teams make a 10-year commitment to see their daughters succeed in school and in higher education. The program is in its 20th year of existence and has persistence rates ranging from 74 to 90%. The success of this program has been replicated at the University of Texas, Austin, and University of Texas, El Paso. Often mothers with more than one daughter participate in the program, with each of their daughters entering as they reach the grade at which the program begins. For example, the program at UT Austin highlighted a "dream team" of three sisters (18, 15, and 11 years old) who wanted to pursue "becoming a lawyer, a psychologist and a veterinarian" with "a best friend—their mother" (www.utexas.edu/features/archive/2002/motherdaughter.html). The activities sponsored by the program create a bond between the mother and daughters but also among the daughters. The daughters, in turn, influence their friends who may not be participating in the program. This activity creates a "college-going culture" in the community, which is essential in encouraging large numbers of students within vulnerable high schools to begin thinking about attending college.

An important by-product of this program is that many mothers, inspired by their daughters' educational successes, have had their aspirations rekindled and have sought their GED (graduate equivalence degree) and enrolled in junior colleges, and some have even graduated from college. The knowledge mothers obtain about the logistics of college is used to explore their own academic dreams and to encourage other women in their communities to pursue education. This model of spreading educational success is not commonly supported in most educational institutions. It is an innovative intervention using naturally occurring networks and alliances to enhance educational achievement (Hurtado, 1997). Educational engagement is not a priori defined as occurring in a linear fashion from parent to child, rather it is a relational analysis of educational achievement that involves naturally occurring human relations and institutional resources and assets to enhance the probability that individuals will become interested in pursuing higher education (Hurtado, 1997).

Lessons Learned

These two examples provide inspiration for broadening our conceptualization of the function of education and its outcomes for individual well-being as well as overall societal health. If second language learning, especially Spanish, is conceptualized as an asset rather than as a barrier to educational achievement, how can these naturally occurring skills be cultivated not only for Latino/a students but for monolingual English-speaking students as well? Why are Spanish-speaking students not treated as experts who can share their skills with other students? When Spanish-speaking students experience limitations in English, pairing them with English-dominant students who want to learn Spanish may be an educational plus for all involved. Given that Spanish knowledge is likely to be desirable in many professions in the near future, Spanish-speaking students (and parents) should be better integrated into the educational process and training of monolinguals. There are many creative ways in which an important asset such as fluency in Spanish could be used in educational institutions at all levels.

The HMDP example also merits consideration for non-Latino/a interventions. For example, if

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the mother-daughter programs were integrated by ethnicity and race, what would non-Latino/a parents learn about raising children that are connected to families throughout the developmental cycle? What if the programs were integrated by gender so that fathers were also encouraged to become an active part of their daughters' education? What if there was a father-son program? Might such a program diminish the incidence of gang membership, truancy, and drop-out rates among boys of all races and ethnicities? The reconceptualization of the function and purpose of education can benefit from looking beyond Latino/as' lack of educational achievement as a "social problem" and, instead, conceptualize it as providing infinite possibilities for expanding educational theory and practice.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that many challenges remain for educating the majority of Latino/as. These challenges, however, should be viewed within the context of the enormous progress made within the last 30 years. The context should also include the diversity within the Latino/a population based on the national origin, size of the population, and geographical dispersion of each Latino/a group. These factors contribute to a powerful structural context that should be taken into account when developing local and national policy interventions (Oakes et al., 2006). A further consideration is the enormous growth of the Latino/a population. If current demographic projections are correct, educating Latino/as will become an economic and social imperative, as well as a social justice issue. The obstacles obstructing Latino/as' educational achievement also present infinite possibilities for improving education for all students.

Notes

1. We use the ethnic terms that appear in the sources cited. In this case, Chicano/as refers to Mexican ancestry Latino/as.
2. In 2008, California was once again considering reintroducing SB 1301, California's DREAM Act.

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