
U.S. EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES AND THE NEW LATINO IMMIGRANT

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Abstract

Population projections indicate that the Latino population as a whole will become the largest single ethnic group in the United States (U.S.) by 2020, a significant portion of which can be attributed to immigration. While the U.S. Latino population consists largely of Mexican, Puerto Rican, and Cuban descent groups, recent immigrants hail increasingly from Central and South American countries, leading to even greater population diversity. Disproportionately poor and unskilled, Latino immigrants enter the U.S. hoping for economic gain and a rising living standard for themselves and their families. Thus, as have other groups, they seek educational opportunities as a means for social and economic mobility. However, Latinos have been particularly marginalized in terms of educational outcomes in the U.S. We examine this problem against recent demographic changes, tracking educational achievement for the U.S. Latino population in general and new immigrants in particular. Analyzing these outcomes in light of societal stratification and inter- and intra-group structural relations, we develop a critical assessment of them relative to current policy perspectives and propose an alternative policy approach to education based on cultural dynamics reflected in patterns of interaction within and between the groups in question and the broader society.

INTRODUCTION

Individuals decide to leave their homelands and travel to a foreign country to live and work for a variety of reasons, including for example, escaping some of the direst conditions of human social existence, physical torture, religious persecution, political repression, or grinding poverty. As a destination of choice, the United States has had a long history of immigration and, although the image of the U.S. as the "land of opportunity" has faded, its "pull" still appears more salient

than its "push," with immigrants attracted by the hope of a better life. "Pushed from their homelands by overpopulation, slow economic growth, and lack of opportunity," immigrants have been pulled to the U.S. and other developed countries by "relatively high wages, greater opportunities, and the strong demand for cheap labor in certain parts of the economy (for example, garment industry sweatshops, some forms of agriculture, and domestic work)" (Bradshaw, et al., 2001: p. 230).

Immigration is one of the principal population processes in the contemporary period and, while immigration to the U.S. has originated from around the world, one of its largest sources has been Latin America. Indeed, at the end of the Twentieth Century, approximately half of U.S. population growth was due to immigration, and half of all immigrants to the U.S. were from Latin America, with Mexico being the single largest country of origin.⁽¹⁾ Projections indicate that the Latino population as a whole will become the largest single ethnic group in the U.S. over the next two decades - and it is a population becoming increasingly diverse. Although the U.S. Latino population is constituted largely by Mexican, Puerto Rican, and Cuban descent groups, the new Latino immigrants include growing numbers from Central and South American countries to a significant degree.

In general, possibilities for improving life chances are the principal motivation for emigrating. These new immigrants are disproportionately poor and unskilled, and a major impetus for their immigration has been the dream of economic gain and rise in living standards for themselves and their families. To that end, as have so many other groups, they seek educational opportunities as a means for social and economic attainment and mobility. However, the allocation of life chances - i.e., acquiring and sharing in the economic and cultural goods of society - is asymmetrical, with material rewards and cultural goods differentially distributed, e.g., as in access to education (Weber, 1968).

Access to and the benefits of education are not necessarily available to all in the U.S., and Latinos have been marginalized on educational outcomes. Given this problem and the increasing numbers of Latinos in the U.S., our purpose here is twofold. First, we track educational outcomes and achievement for the U.S. Latino population in general and the new immigrants in particular. Second, we analyze these outcomes in light of institutionalized societal stratification and inter- and intra-group structural relations. After providing a demographic profile of the relevant groups as background, we examine the institutional role of education in a society marked by increasing diversity and fragmentation, as it applies to Latinos.

U.S. schools can play a unifying role and to prepare individuals participate as productive actors in the economic life of the country. To what extent does this -

can this - happen? What are the educational outcomes for various individuals and groups in society? Framed by these concerns, we next look at U.S. Latino educational attainment patterns and effects. We develop a critical assessment of these effects relative to current policy perspectives and consider related implications for educational achievement and economic outcomes. Based on this assessment, and drawing on the notion of "culture as a resource," we propose an alternative policy approach to education based on cultural dynamics and resource development reflected in patterns of interaction within and between the groups in question and the broader society.

DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS AND PATTERNS

Among the fastest-growing ethnic or racial groups in the U.S., the number of Latinos in the population has almost doubled over the last two decades. The share of Hispanic-origin population in the total U.S. population rose from 6.5% in 1980 to 8.2% in 1990 to 12.5% in 2000, with projections to 17.4% in 2020. A large part of this growth has been due to immigration and resulting increases in the foreign-born population, with 38.5% of Hispanics identified as such. In fact, the 2000 U.S. Census reported that Hispanics constituted almost half (47.2%) of the total foreign-born U.S. population (31,107,889). This represents an 18.7% relative increase in foreign-born identified as Hispanic between 1980 and 2000 (USCB, 2001; 2002; Schick and Schick, 1991; Therrien and Ramirez, 2001).

Highly diverse in and of itself, the Latino population consists of several national-origin groups, the largest is Mexican at 66.1%, followed by Puerto Rican at 9% and Cuban at 4%. However, most dramatic is the increasing presence of other Latinos (20.9%), representing Central and South American groups. Some 84.6% of these new Latino groups are foreign-born, compared to 30.1% in 1980. (2) Although figures vary (Suro 2002), it is clear that Mexico remains the main source of Latino immigrants. Also apparent are growing numbers Costa Rica, Guatemala, El Salvador, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Nicaragua, and Honduras, to the extent that the number and diversity of the U.S. Latino population continue to swell.(3) The highest fertility level of all groups in the U.S. is among foreign-born Latinas.

Economic Characteristics

Regarding income, the mean earnings of the Mexican-origin group is \$8,500 compared to \$10,000 for Puerto Ricans and \$13,500 for Cubans. Among the new groups, Dominicans stand out having earnings below \$8,000, while incomes of other Central American groups are roughly equivalent to Puerto Ricans in average earnings (Suro 2002). Frankly, average income may be even lower

because figures do not include low-wage illegal or undocumented individuals and families. Overall, the share of persons with incomes below the poverty level reflects a pattern of extreme disadvantage. Relative to the native-born Latino population, income differences for foreign-born Latinos are even larger, with greater numbers in operative, service, and laborer jobs. Actual levels are probably even more extreme because those reported do not take into account the growing unemployment in these sectors and the resultant increasing poverty.(4)

We should add a caveat. Key sectors agriculture, janitorial service, restaurant and hotel service, garment-making, manufacturing, and many types of informal sector services, e.g., child and elder care and domestic services of the U.S. economy have long maintained a dependence on immigrant labor, and immigrant labor has constituted a major portion of the workforce. (Sierra 2000). Although these jobs pay low wages and contain little opportunity for upward mobility, they still represent an improvement over conditions in home countries. For example, in 1991, the minimum monthly salary for full-time work in the U.S. was thirteen times higher than the minimum wage in the Dominican Republic; a Brazilian babysitter in New York made more in one week than she made in a month as head nurse back home (Foner, 1998). (Although actual purchasing power brings these amounts closer to parity, the difference is still large enough to act as an inducement to immigration.)

Yet, within the U.S., the poverty rate among Latinos, at 21.4% overall, is twice that of the population at large (USCB, 2002; Proctor and Dalaker, 2002). Moreover, the new Latino groups constitute a crucial component of those living below the U.S. poverty line, with Dominicans at 36% (Suro 2002). In general, they are more likely to be poor and remain poor longer than the immigrants of the past. Whereas White European immigrants of previous periods eventually entered "the great middle class" (Bradshaw, et al., 2001: p. 232), many contemporary nonwhite immigrants face permanent poverty and marginality (Massey, 1995). Indeed, each successive wave of immigrants "has a higher poverty rate, and a much larger share of their children will grow up in poverty" (Camarota, in Fletcher, 1999: p. A2).

Locational Trends

High proportions of immigrants often flock to urban areas "in search of an economic foothold, with high numbers of non-English speakers, as well as the usual issues of all cities - community safety, lack of affordable housing, shrinking base of manufacturing jobs, growing number of homeless, deteriorating infrastructure, traffic congestion, and poverty" (Estrada, 1993: p. 244). However, Latino population growth rates have surged even in places not traditionally serving as Latino immigrant destinations, small towns and cities that might offer jobs (e.g.,

in manufacturing and meatpacking plants). For example, Latinos in North Carolina rose 655% (USCB 2001). However, it is the overall Latino geographic and occupational concentration that renders the impact of their growth particularly significant relative to their share of the total population. There are sixteen states that now feature Latino populations of over 100,000, but the greatest geographic distribution is concentrated most in California (36%), Texas (22%), New York (9%), Florida (9%), Illinois (5%), New Jersey (4%), and Arizona (4%) (Suro, 2002; USCB, 1999, 2000).

In addition, the composition of Latino populations by national origin differs by location, such that geographic concentration, particularly for non-Mexicans, makes their numbers far more significant than might otherwise be suggested. The tendency for illegal immigrants to reside in areas with large concentrations of legal immigrants further affects impact of immigration on the labor market (Sassen, 1988), and on related education issues. In fact, while poor immigrants have long constituted an important part of the low-wage labor pool, increasing size and competitiveness in this labor supply due to current economic declines and rising unemployment at other occupational levels and across the population as a whole have placed them at even greater disadvantage.

Educational Demographics

"There is a simple and recognized association between demographic growth and education. An increase in children requires more classrooms, more teachers, and more resources" (Estrada, 1993: p. 231). Overall, between 1990 and 2000, there was little proportionate change in the school-age population relative to the population as a whole, with 1% increase in the "K-12" age (5 to 17 years old) population and 1% decrease in traditional college-age (18-24 years old). However, growth among minority school-age children was three times that of the majority population. Whereas the White 5-17 and 18-24 age groups grew by 3% and 1%, respectively, relative to the population as a whole, the Latino school-age population increased by 22% and 12%, respectively (USCB 1999, 2000). Projections indicate that, in 2026, the U.S. will have the exact inverse of student representation as in 1990 when White students constituted 70% of the enrolled K-12 student body (Figueroa and Garcia, 1995: p.148).

The student population is increasingly diverse. For example, Los Angeles public schools teach children who speak at least 81 languages other than English at home (*Sociology of Education Newsletter*, 1992); and in Arlington, Virginia, in the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area, over 100 different "home languages" are spoken by the children in one school district. Moreover, at least ten states reflect a majority of students who trace their ancestry from places other than White Europe. With both high birth rates and high youth immigration rates, Latinos are the fastest

growing ethnic group in public schools, increasing from 6% in 1973 to 12% in 1993 and projected to at least 20 percent by 2030.

Moreover, given the large number of foreign-born Latinos, impact of immigration on Latinos as a whole - on their educational needs and on the specific locations in which they reside, work, and attend school - is intensified (cf. Estrada 1993). Not surprisingly, given geographic and residential patterns, and U.S. societal dynamics and relations, Latino (and Black) students are increasingly segregated by race, attending predominantly minority schools (Ballantine, 1997; Frankenberg and Lee, 2002). Note that 30.3% of school-age Latinos under the age of 18 live in poverty (Therrien and Ramirez 2000), and minority schools are highly correlated with high poverty, in addition to low parental involvement, lack of resources, less experienced and credentialed teachers, and higher teacher turnover - all of which combine to exacerbate educational inequality for minority students (Frankenberg and Lee, 2002).

The Promise of Education

Throughout the world, education is perceived as an important means to social and economic progress and, in the U.S., as elsewhere, notions of economic development have been closely linked to those of education. Thus, policy discussions of education as a social institution involve depictions of schools as affording members of a society opportunities to learn and develop skills and capacities to compete in labor markets and to participate meaningfully in society. Indeed, a basic purpose of schools is imparting the ways of society and the skills and capacities necessary for that society to survive and for the individual to survive within it. This socialization through schooling aims at development of productive members of society and at the reproduction of culture (Bourdieu, 1990; Boocock, 1984).

In fact, principal motivations for attending school include acquiring skills to "fit in" or navigate within the wider society, particularly as regards obtaining employment and increasing earning potential. As Ballantine (1997: 60-61) points out, "in the United States, the expectation is that we can improve our life position with good education and hard work, that all members of society have an equal opportunity to experience upward mobility. Those with higher levels of education have more chances at a better job and salary, but the question remains: Who gets the higher levels of education?"(5) Status attainment and occupational mobility have long been principal goals expressed as educational motivations, i.e., for acquiring relevant "human capital," or a person's stock of skills and productive knowledge. Operationalized as educational achievement, human capital has been measured as levels of schooling, rates of school completion or graduation, test scores, and the like.

Moreover, successful socialization through schooling also leads to the accumulation of "cultural capital" by individuals. Cultural capital, i.e., the general cultural background, knowledge, skills, and dispositions passed from one generation to the next, is central to the process of cultural reproduction, and also serves as a resource for status attainment and occupational mobility, as characterized by the dominant mainstream society (Bourdieu, 1990). Thus, "a student destined for a leadership or elite position may acquire skills and knowledge different from one who will enter the blue-collar work force" (Ballantine, 1997: 24). However, cultural capital also has a determinant effect on success in schooling itself, and cultural capital - based on mainstream activities and values - that translate into educational success are often unavailable immigrants. In fact, schooling institutionalizes and entrenches societal inequality by simultaneously reproducing dominant group privilege and endorsing the resultant inequality (Bourdieu 1990; MacLeod 1995).

Language proficiency itself, defined, as in most societies, according to dominant group and class designation, reflects both aspects of cultural capital. It operates as a status marker and predetermines probabilities for school success and access to more "desirable" occupational roles. English proficiency is at the heart of controversies over bi/multilingual and English as a second language approaches and programs in schools. Debates continue about the need for a basic level of proficiency for educational advancement and on the gaining of proficiency as an educational goal in and of itself that can later be employed to increase occupational opportunities. Low levels of English proficiency among U.S. Latinos, especially the new Latino immigrants, and others effectively operate as a barrier to educational achievement and limit to labor market possibilities.

Educational attainment is influenced by a number of different social factors and interactions between them. Of these, race, ethnicity, and country of origin are crucial variables, along with gender, class, and location - all of which affect educational practice and outcomes, including student attitudes and how students are treated in schools. In other words, schooling effects and outcomes can vary substantially depending on socioeconomic class, racial, ethnic, and/or cultural background, and neighborhood and district. These relate, in part, to how schools function as a sorting and selection mechanism that reproduces and maintains the social hierarchy and stratification system (Boocock 1984; Bourdieu 1990). The sorting process itself is complex, involving differences in level and quality of education; differential access to educational facilities on the basis of class, race, and ethnic origin; and parental education, occupation, and income (Ballantine, 1997; Bourdieu, 1990). These factors are brought into sharp relief in the Latino immigrant experience.

Recent research indicates that, of the most important issues facing Latinos today, 58% put education at the top of their list.(6) In fact, 68% of Latino immigrants cited education as the most important issue, compared to 50% of native-born Latinos (Pew/Kaiser, 2002). Complexity of immigration patterns, subgroup identities, and language proficiency of Latinos, combined with the fact that they are the fastest growing segment of the population, and are among the country's youngest group on average, are contributing factors to their expanding educational needs. These factors, along with economic divisions, limited political resources, and competing social interests, represent important concerns with implications for broader systemic relevance since they vary across and within public schools and districts (Ruiz, 2001).

Educational Outcomes

Illiteracy is generally a problem, with over 28 million functionally illiterate adults who cannot read simple instructions and over 48 million more with low level reading skills. More than 7% of citizens in their early twenties read below the fourth-grade level, and 6% cannot perform routine simple tasks such as filling out job applications (Otto, 1999). Moreover, this illiteracy disproportionately affects those in poverty. Reasons behind this are myriad, but suffice it to say that, at a time when education is becoming increasingly important for upward mobility across society, minority and immigrant groups are a priori disadvantaged in their U.S. educational experience.

Public schools most likely to serve these populations are particularly stressed and in disarray. Plagued by limited support, shrinking budgets, and programmatic controversies, these schools lie far from serving as a means to equality or opportunity (Bradshaw, et al., 2001: p. 232). As Noguera and Akom (2000) point out, "poor children of color attend schools that, on most measures of quality and funding, are woefully inadequate. This is particularly true in economically depressed urban areas, where bad schools are just one of several obstacles with which poor people must contend" (Noguera and Akom, 2000). Not surprisingly, there are direct correlations between ethnic and racial identity, immigration, and poverty among public school students and their educational opportunities and outcomes (Gay, 1993), and educational statistics reveal that ethnic minorities consistently fare poorly when compared to white students (García, 2001; USDE, 2001).

Latino students are four times as likely as non-Latinos to drop out of school, and Latinos have the lowest overall high school completion rates of all groups. In 2000, only 64.1% of Latinos, 18-24 years of age, had completed secondary schooling, compared to 91.8% whites, 90.6% Asians, and 83.7% Blacks (USDE, 2001). Arguably, a major consequence of such limited schooling, along

with other factors, is the marginal economic and political position of Latinos in society (García, 2001; NCLR, 2001; Pérez and de la Rosa-Salazar, 1997).

Moreover, determinant of, but not reflected in literal measures of completion rates are disparities in content and quality of education. Living in the poorest neighborhoods and attending schools with the least resources, they have little access to, for example, "high tech" knowledge and equipment, and consequently less opportunity to develop related skills. Furthermore, teachers matter. The importance of teachers cannot be overstressed, but students in high-poverty schools are more likely than others to be taught by those who are themselves poorly prepared or overburdened, with even greater disparities apparent in predominantly minority schools. At the same time that the Latino school-age population is booming, their educational opportunities are being vastly curtailed. Schools serving them are starved for funding and other resources, with negative impacts on teacher training, language proficiency programs, textbooks, and curriculum development. Not surprisingly, we find much lower test scores for students outside of the "mainstream" of society. Test scores reveal more than just racial disparities; they reveal a close correspondence between scores students obtain and broader patterns of inequality.

Higher education has a different kind of relationship to students as individuals, and related college success is dependent on prior educational outcomes, and on the relevance that students might (or might not) see possible opportunities for future employment. Even when Latino high school graduates enroll in college, they are less likely to earn a four-year degree, long regarded as important to occupational attainment and mobility, due in large part to financial pressures.⁽⁷⁾ They are more likely to attend community colleges, take partial course loads, and maintain outside jobs to contribute to family incomes. Poor preparation in earlier schooling remains an impediment to college success and, in addition to financial reasons, also helps account for their greater enrollments in community colleges as opposed to four-year institutions. Indeed, many attend community colleges only to obtain a certificate of vocational training, with no intention of earning a two-year degree (Schemo, 2002; Pew/Kaiser, 2002), thus pre-selecting certain educational outcomes.

SOCIOCULTURAL DYNAMICS AND EDUCATIONAL EFFECTS

Immigrant incorporation takes place through the more public sectors of the larger society, particularly the school system and the job market. Incorporation means assimilation, and, in the past, the goal of assimilation was taken for granted, assumed by mainstream and non-mainstream, immigrant and non-immigrant, alike - with preference given dominant mainstream social and cultural features. On the

surface of things, assimilation, as absorption of one group into another was viewed as a normal cultural dynamic resulting from inter-group contact. Yet, however "normal" it may be, assimilation is not an "equal opportunity" process of merger and consolidation. The assimilation process, whether intentionally or unintentionally, involves explicit and implicit devaluation and de-legitimization of the culture and identity of the "non-mainstream" individual and group - and, more often than not, this has been framed, directly and indirectly, in racist and ethnocentric terms that define and categorize characteristic and identity desirability according to the dominant status group. As such, the assimilation process is marked by subtle and not so subtle alienation and dehumanization of the "other" ethnic and racial identities.

Whether normal or not (and whether the end goal might be preferred or not), assimilation is a fundamentally destructive process. As Young and Arrigo (1999: p. 17) assert, assimilation is "a process by which one culture is destroyed and another is imposed upon a people, usually by force. In the process the young people of a status group defined as 'inferior' adopt values and norms of the status groups defined as 'superior.'" However, "people do not readily surrender their culture The current debate surrounding bilingual education (English and Spanish) in primary and secondary public schools, particularly in the southwest region of the United States, addresses the potential destruction of culture, as Hispanics are assimilated into American culture as second-class citizens."

The assimilation process clearly reflects societal power, and degree to which it is invoked on the basis of race, class, country of origin, and the like, depends to a large degree on the extent of racialized advantage and disadvantage that are part of the institutional structure and relations in the receiving country. Especially for those who are also nonwhite, assimilation can mean occupying a position in the social structure from which any upward mobility would be highly unlikely (Bradshaw, et al, 2001: p. 233). Moreover, surrounding controversies confront immigrant incorporation and social and cultural adjustment as critical questions of identity and reflect on the ways that immigrants learn to cope in new settings. Indeed, consideration of the relationship between culture and structure requires investigating ways that immigrants negotiate their new locations. Prominent among these are social networks.

Social Networks and Immigrant Enclaves

Sometimes called "migration chains," these social networks are group-sustained structures providing information and assistance that influence immigrant decisions about destination, settlement, occupations, and social relations (Baily, 1994). They reproduce status positions in society. For example, prior immigrants helping newer immigrants to find jobs of the same type in the same place is a

typical pattern. There are cases where the laborers in a particular shop or factory all hail from the same village in the country of origin. As Rothstein (1999: p. 170) observes,

Few immigrants leave home without some idea of how to find work in America. Once an immigrant community is established here, this becomes a lot easier. Immigrants recruit friends and relatives from back home when their employers need additional help. In the garment districts of Los Angeles, New York, or Miami, entire plants are staffed by immigrants from the same small village in Mexico, El Salvador, or China. Once such powerful networks are established, policy is impotent to break them.

Thus, social placements are reproduced through cooperative helping networks - and these patterns are durable.

Moreover, they impact identity and assimilation processes. Today's newcomers often cluster in enclaves near family and friends, finding comfort and security in an environment of shared languages and cultures (Foner, 1998). The role of these networks and enclaves has changed over time. Immigrant enclaves in the past assisted newly-arriving immigrants in a gradual assimilation into their new environment; current ones operate more like way stations, supporting different settlement behaviors and offering limited insulation from assimilation (Portes and Manning, 2001). New immigrants find modern transportation and communications changing the context in which they live out their lives, facilitating the forging and maintaining of ties across national borders (Foner, 1998).

Thus, contemporary Latino immigration patterns exhibit an "ongoing experience" characterized by back-and-forth movement and contact between the U.S. and country of origin. This fluid immigration influences the way in which various Latinos identify themselves and adjust to their new settings. Origin-based cultural practices and language preferences are more easily maintained through continual contact facilitated by modern means of communication and transportation (Rumbaut and Cornelius, 1995; Suarez-Orozco, 1989). In fact, increased ongoing contact is both direct and indirect: direct contact based on physical travel and direct communication, and indirect contact via expanded mass media (radio, television, and print). This contact is more encompassing than in past immigration waves, and diminished the urgency to adopt or adapt to social practices and norms and to maintain prior national identities. In fact, this changed situation has arguably resulted in fewer applications for citizenship. In 2000, over 12.8 million Latinos were foreign-born, of which 1 in 4 were naturalized citizens. Among foreign-born Latinos, 43% entered the U.S. in the 1990s, while 27% entered before 1980. Although 74% of those who entered before 1970 had

obtained citizenship by 2000, only 7% of those who entered between 1990 and 2000 had become citizens (USCB, 2001).(8) Overall, Latino immigrants are less likely than other immigrant groups to secure naturalization (Sierra 2000), and more than two-thirds (68%) of foreign-born Latinos indicate their country of origin as their principal social identifier (Pew/Kaiser 2002).

Language, Identity, and Schooling

The crucial link among Latinos is the Spanish language, although dialects and fluency can vary within and between the groups. In most instances, this linguistic link acts as one of the most salient factors reinforcing Latino identity (Comas-Diaz, 2001; NCLR, 2001). The change in the role of the immigrant enclave and social network diminishes the urgency to learn to read, write, and speak English. Many still do acquire some English language proficiency, but learning delays translate into periods of limited access to of public services.

In general, language difference and concentration in locations and school districts, and in specified occupational niches, limit structural and cultural interaction and contact. The vast majority of Latinos, irrespective of country of origin, believe that immigrants need to learn English to increase their chances for success (Pew/Kaiser, 2002). An overwhelming majority of Mexicans (89%), Puerto Ricans (86%), Cubans (89%), Central Americans (94%), South Americans (89%), Salvadorans (94%), Dominicans (92%), and Colombians (88%) all agree on the need for proficiency in English. However, almost three-quarters (72%) of foreign-born Latinos speak Spanish predominantly and approximately one-quarter (24%) is bilingual. (Note that 61% of native-born Latinos are English dominant and 35% are bilingual.) Of course, these figures tell us little about quality of spoken language - whether Spanish or English - and, in light of socioeconomic variation, we might assume a certain amount of "class difference" within and among some of the groups.

Shared language is often considered an important cultural identifier at and across various levels of analysis, and its establishment is an important feature of nation building and marker of national integration (Anderson, 1991). Additionally, level and quality of fluency often operate as an obvious status indicator within a society. Thus, national language proficiency provides a certain amount of cultural capital and is required for schooling success and occupational mobility in the wider society. In the U.S., proficiency in English serves as economic and educational currency.(9)

However, the Latino immigrant student comes to the schooling process without the language in which that process is embedded (Figueroa and García, 1995: p. 148). Frankly, any public school in any country might expect children to

speak, or learn to speak, with relative fluency the officially-recognized national language. The problem is that, too often students with limited English proficiency are assumed to have limited intellectual potential across the curriculum, e.g., in mathematics, science, and analytical thinking. As previously discussed, a primary function of schooling in society is socialization and incorporation, but, unfortunately, many teachers assume that children from certain ethnic groups and classes are universally disadvantaged or incompetent, and do not look beyond normative mainstream characterizations and stereotypes (even if unwittingly).(10)

Figuroa and García's (1995: p. 149) comments are germane: "Children from diverse learning environments have traditionally been described as developmentally deficient in language, cognition, attention, memory, perception, learning ability, IQ, and just about every major benchmark of 'normal' growth and development. Virtually every 'objective' test used to assess individual skills or aptitudes has been instrumental in profiling these deficits." Ironically, from their inception, "standard" assessments and tests operate under key, robust assumptions: They assume equal or comparable exposure to the content of the assessments prior to the assessment, and they assume a high degree of homogeneity of experiences. In fact, "the validity of all mental testing rests on the fundamental assumption that those tested have had a common opportunity to learn the skills, facts, principles, and methods of procedure exemplified in the tests." It is on the basis of these assumptions that individuals with average scores are labeled "normal" and those with below average scores are labeled "less than able" or having "special needs." Clearly, such assumptions are highly problematic in and of themselves, and their effects on the subject students are cumulative over time, leading to an even wider achievement chasm and the reproduction of societal inequality.

PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

Ways public schools might affect and be affected by Latino representation and participation are of primary concern here. The prospect of having a significantly growing segment of the population with less than a high school education has potentially serious social and economic implications (Gibson, 2002), and the expected growth and diversity in the Latino population accentuates the necessity to identify and examine approaches to enhance educational attainment. Low educational attainment means higher levels of unemployment among Latinos in general and Latino immigrants in particular. Moreover, the jobs that Latinos tend to hold are also more likely to be vulnerable to economic disruptions; they are more likely to be lower-paying, less stable, and more hazardous than those of non-Latinos (cf. Estrada 1993; Pew/Kaiser 2002).

Both foreign- and native-born Latinos continue to encounter barriers to educational attainment and occupational mobility. Societal stratification and inequality negatively affect Latino educational achievement by limiting exposure and access to opportunities that promote greater representation and participation in the broader society. "Given the history of racism in the United States, and the ongoing reality of racial discrimination, it would be even more surprising if an achievement gap did not exist" (Noguera and Akom, 2000). Indeed, Latinos overwhelmingly identify problems of discrimination in general (82%), and more specifically in the workplace (78%) and at schools (75%), because of racial and ethnic background (Pew/Kaiser, 2002).(11)

Yet, Latino immigrants still tend to feel that the U.S. offers more possibilities for employment (76%) and education (80%) (Pew/Kaiser, 2002). Even with recent economic decline and increased racist aggression, pressure to immigrate has not abated to any appreciable degree and there has been little interruption in the supply of newcomers. Consequently, even if second and third generations become more integrated or incorporated, new immigrant flows help to sustain non-mainstream cultures and non-English languages (Bradshaw, et al., 2001).

Although not fully incorporated or integrated into mainstream society, neither are Latino immigrants completely autonomous and independent of it. Schools are in a unique position to mediate this relationship, and to facilitate related social and economic mobility. To the extent that positive change might be possible, "it is more likely to occur in education than in any other sector. This is because, despite its faults, public education remains the most... accessible institution in this country. In the post-welfare reform period, it is all that remains of the social safety net for poor children" (Noguera and Akom, 2000) - even with its many holes.

Looking beyond its function of status quo maintenance and reproduction, and taking seriously the possibility of education as a social and economic facilitator, we argue for a more inclusive approach that considers culture as a resource, looking deliberately to how "alternative" cultural features can be constructed as bases for positive educational outcomes. Degrees of cultural attachment and affiliation can vary greatly, but the devaluation that takes place as part of the assimilation process can, lead to "reactive" ethnicity that is artificially maintained as a source of social worth. However, romanticizing ethnic origins also can be problematic; many who left their original homelands did so because opportunities there were closed to them there (NCSS, 1995: p. 116). Instead, recognizing that coping with change and adapting to new conditions are fundamental to cultural survival, we call for a more "proactive" educational

approach to encourage constructive, rather than destructive, reactions to new conditions.

Schools as Agents of Change

A first step might be to address important questions about how to best achieve and support literacy development in English language learning by children and how literacy development can foster learning in general. Here we suggest looking to other countries (e.g., in Europe) for guidance, given the greater extent to which they succeed in teaching non-native languages to children at early ages (Glenn, et al., 1996). Moreover, recognizing that knowing another language can be a kind of cultural capital in and of itself, and not a detriment, would be a positive reorientation to learning possibilities.

For example, a practical attitudinal shift might reflect recognition of different languages as legitimate communication systems, and the situation could be constructed as an opportunity to develop full literacy in at least two languages. Direction for this approach can be gleaned from the relative success in U.S. student achievement across curricular areas in classes run by teachers trained in English as a second language, even where not merely two, but numerous different languages are spoken by students. Of course, the greatest success is in schools that tend to be well funded and progressive in the first place and the students themselves bring relatively high amounts of cultural capital to the learning experience - whereas schools that most of the students in question attend lack institutional assets. Several studies show that middle-class bilingual test takers often do better than middle-class English speakers, and older bilinguals who had been educated in their primary language also often do better than English speakers (Figueroa and García, 1995).

Confounding the funding deficiency problem are attitudinal frameworks within which the wider society and many teachers interpret the learning capacities of non-mainstream students. If the goal of schooling really is to raise educational outcomes of these students, then a challenge would be to prepare teachers to connect meaningfully to them and re-orient their thinking and develop capacities to recognize and appreciate both differences and similarities that students might be able to ultimately parlay into currency for navigating the larger society. As we have stated, teachers matter. As such, they need to learn to incorporate a positive frame and to value (aspects of) diversity in a way that could translate into effective practice and achievement.

This is not an across-the-board endorsement or indictment of one way or the other. Rather, it recognizes pros and cons on both sides. Positing on the one

hand that teachers need to be "cultural brokers," we suggest, on the other hand, that understanding - without preconceived biases - the variegated values and behaviors that different groups might bring to their new settings can be a first step in exploring possibilities for establishing an equitable "exchange rate" for cultural capital. Rather than assuming student incompetence, teachers need to recognize that competence can be situational, and to determine and design learning tools to capitalize on the strengths and capabilities that the various students bring with them (Gay, 1993). This of principle underlies notions of multicultural education, i.e., accepting and respecting diversity as a kind of currency itself, offering possibilities for more equitable (relatively speaking) educational, and thus occupational, opportunities. Instead of constructing student cultural difference as a social and educational problem in the first place, look to it as a resource for providing ways to enhance and support the learning experience. Such an approach calls for a pedagogical change focusing on student strengths and understands how identity, culture, and power might differentially construct expressions and interpretations of those strengths (Aronowitz and Giroux, 1993).

However, although an appreciation of differences can lead to more effective schooling, "teaching students to function effectively in mainstream society and in social settings different from the ones in which they were socialized, and helping them learn new cognitive styles and learning patterns, also must be major goals. The successful multicultural school helps students become aware of and able to acquire cultural and cognitive alternatives, thus enabling them to function successfully within cultural environments other than their own" (NCSS, 1995: p. 119). This refers to the development of an awareness that crosses cultural boundaries, understanding that difference does not necessarily imply inferiority or superiority - and it should apply to all students. We know that the academic achievement of minorities increases when cooperative approaches to teaching are employed, and all students develop more positive attitudes about diversity when teachers use cooperative, rather than competitive or dismissive learning methods (Aronson and Gonzalez, 1988). In effect, the end goal for the ethnic and linguistic minority student would be a mindset that, a priori, privileges neither opposition nor conformity. Rather, it reflects a belief in achievement with cultural affirmation, becoming more critical than conformist - accommodation without assimilation (Mehan, et al., 1994).

Networking in Action

We must add a sobering note. It would be naïve to deny the institutionalized reliance on poorly educated, low-wage immigrants and minorities in maintaining the status quo and lifestyle of the upper, middle, and even lower-middle classes (Rothstein, 1999), and it would be even more naïve to deny the role of schools in reproducing that relationship. Yet, although marked by inertia,

institutions can change. Thus, we look for possibilities for change and for means of realizing those possibilities or, renegotiating the constituent positions and roles within those institutions. While society establishes parameters in which immigrants live in large part by the economic, social, and political dynamics, they need not be passive subjects, and demands for recognition and legitimacy in the educational milieu can provide a basis for advancement even in the face of those forces. Furthermore, there are existing structures within the immigrant community whose functions can be re-framed as cooperative and supportive arrangements for educational and economic attainment and mobility. Here, we refer to the immigrant and minority social networks.

As discussed above, immigrant social networks and enclaves are considered relative to group survival and maintenance. However, we propose recasting these structures, not merely as sustaining mechanisms, but as devices for advancement and empowerment. These networks represent a social capital - interpersonal networks providing resources or status that can be exploited in other areas of social life and potentially leveraged in the pursuit of cultural or economic capital (Bourdieu, 1985; Calhoun 2002: p.443). Immigrant social networks constitute social capital that can be converted, in both symbolic and practical terms, into cultural and economic capital. Families and communities are the levels on which social capital is constructed and, in much the same way as grassroots development approaches operate, these people in these groups come together to realize social and economic goods. The efficacy of this strategy depends on recognition of existing similarities (e.g., in values, goals, or interests) that can be utilized as social connectors to broaden networks beyond the defined group - within and between Latino groups, and with other minorities, and the wider society - and expand opportunities. Again, rather than viewing difference as a problem, ethnic resiliency and pluralism can be viewed as resources for building bridges - as opposed to barriers - to other groups and other resources.

For example, an important strategy that has been used by other groups has involved pooling scarce material resources to provide services and establish internal markets on which nascent assets with growth potential can be developed - focusing on internal and external growth and extending the parameters of interaction and contact. Of course, realizing that such an approach can be initially difficult for groups with little extant wealth and education, it might involve, drawing from amounts usually sent "home," with an eye to ultimate outcomes.(12) It would require long-term thinking and vision, creating alternative approaches to understanding, and using external "allies" in specified supportive roles. Of course, developing networks of in- and out-group reciprocity would be critical to such cases, especially when specialized knowledge and material resources might be in short supply.

Educational attainment and economic mobility do not occur in a social vacuum. They are affected in important ways by conditions prevailing in other dimensions of the opportunity structure. Even initially, position in the economic, occupational, or income structure, as well as personal and social conditions, all influence crucial decisions on the need or desirability - and possibility - of educational attainment and related outcomes (Blackwell, 1990). Such decisions can be difficult for Latinos who must make them from a position of relative social disadvantage. However, turning their survival strategies - social networks - into sources of empowerment and working together to achieve specific goals and expand their boundaries, they may be able to succeed. Rather than attending arguments that the educational disadvantages of Latinos are so intertwined with their economic and political powerlessness that it may be impossible to disentangle (Olivas and Duran, 1983) - cogent though they may be - we look for approaches that, over time, might fundamentally challenge institutionalized social and economic arrangements. This, of course, is no simple task. However, our aim here has been to at least open dialogue on the possibilities and to identify areas through which change might be introduced. Stratification exists in every society (Grusky 2001), but perhaps the character and application of that stratification can be reconstructed to draw from a wider social pool.

CONCLUSION

Latinos, as a whole, constitute one of the fastest growing ethnic groups. While native fertility figures contribute in large part, a significant portion also can be attributed to immigration. In fact, over 40% of the Latinos are first generation immigrants. They are more likely to be poor, have higher levels of unemployment, have lower levels of education, and have larger families than native-born groups. These factors are mutually reinforcing and are even more significant when considering that the U.S. is a society that politicizes and exploits racial differences. The new Latino immigrants, as members of a "raced" ethnic group, and also poor and under-educated, consistently face political, economic, and cultural barriers to advancement within the social order. Indeed, what has been called the "foreignization of poverty" is growing, with little relief in sight given decreases in the creation the job for unskilled workers and relatively low levels of educational achievement among these populations (Borjas, in Fletcher, 1999).

Yet, as it does for so many ethnic minority and poor groups, the dream of upward mobility and a better life still lives in the heart of the new Latino immigrant. To realize that dream, to participate in the economy and engage in civic activity, requires basic skills in literacy, some level of English proficiency, and opportunities for upward mobility, all in short supply for Latino immigrants (Estrada, 1993). Latino immigrants have looked to education as a means for

improving their life chances, and the challenge for public schools in the is to capitalize on culture as a resource and to foster the skills and capacities necessary to navigate the (not always friendly, sometimes rough) waters of the mainstream. We call for further investigation of factors such as immigration patterns, group identities, language proficiency, and their relevance to educational attainment. While, on the one hand, schools act to reproduce the social order, we argue that, on the other, they can provide arenas in which new possibilities for advancement can be negotiated. We recognize that stratification and inequality are fundamental aspects of societal relations enacted through power differences and deprivation for particular groups. Deprivation is relative and, for the Latino immigrant and so many others, educational attainment represents a critical element in their struggle for a better life. *La lucha continua.*

NOTES

1. Of the remainder, about 40% came from Asia with the rest primarily from Europe and Africa.
2. For a discussion about categorizing Latinos as “other” or “new,” and of problems determining counts of different groups, see Suro (2002).
3. The Census Bureau (2001) indicates 9% of all other Hispanics in 2000 from Central (5%) and South (4%) America
4. And even greater gender disparities.
5. Moreover, there is no direct correlation between hard work per se and status attainment and occupational mobility; those on the lower rungs of the labor ladder tend to work harder and longer, in the most literal sense, than those on the higher levels.
6. Followed by the economy at 39% and healthcare at 23%.
7. Overall, 11% of Latinos age 25 and over have bachelor's degrees (compared with 28% of whites), ranging from 23% for those of Cuban origin to 7% for those of Mexican origin (USCB, 2001).
8. U.S. naturalization usually requires five years of residence.
9. English also has a certain amount of international cachet, as does Spanish.

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10. For example, a case in point is the youth who is verbally adept, imaginative, creative, and fluent among friends and community - yet appears, or is interpreted as, inarticulate and unthinking in the classroom (Gay, 1993).
 11. Significant in-group discrimination by national origin and class was also noted.
 12. Families and communities in the country of origin are increasingly dependent on remittances from immigrants working in the U.S. (e.g., totaling approximately \$2 billion annually to Mexico) (Sierra 2000).

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