What Kind of Possibilities Do We Have?: Educators' Complex Images of Latino Immigrant Students and Families

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Abstract

The Latino population in the United States is on the rise, but historically, Latino graduation rates have been low. Many educators lack sufficient intercultural preparation, and therefore, teachers may tend to blame student failure on cultural and familial deficiencies. In this study, we elicited educators' perceptions of Latino students and the students' families through 10 focus group interviews at 6 target schools (4 elementary schools, 1 middle school, and 1 high school). Findings include contradictory views of students' and families' attitudes towards education, and consistently negative views of students' and families' educational backgrounds. Latino families were seen as close, caring, and hardworking, but with the wrong priorities and in a state of crisis. Given these findings, we believe that there is a need for educators to question their assumptions through self-reflection, in order to overcome stereotyped images of Latino students. To that end, we recommend 3 overlapping tiers of professional learning with increasing depth of challenging experiences: (1) *intercultural information*, (2) *intercultural inquiry*, and (3) *intercultural immersion*.

I think our state as a whole, our country as a whole -- somebody is going to have to wake up and say, "These people are here, they need things just as our children need things". . . And you know, if we don't help them, then we are running the risk of having new crime in the streets. . . And back there, the boys and girls who are 15 can get out of school and find whatever work there is. What kind of possibilities do we have for children who are 15 and uneducated?

This comment by a U.S. elementary school teacher presents a complex view of Latino students and parents who come from another culture and speak a different language. In the study we report, we found that such images of Latinos' schooling, the effects of immigration, and the way our educational system responds to immigrants were common among the educators who participated. Through focus group interviews, we elicited educators' perceptions of language minority students in a school district in the Southeastern U.S. that has been strongly affected by recent immigration.

With the latest waves of immigration over the last 4 decades, demographic patterns in many public schools across the U.S. have changed markedly. Between 1980 and 2010, the U.S. "Hispanic" [1] population more than tripled, increasing from 14.6 million to 50.5 million. In 2010, Hispanic individuals made up 16.3% of the total U.S. population, and the latest Pew Research projections are that Hispanic individuals will comprise 29% of the population in 2050 (Passel & Cohn, 2008).

Pine County, the site of our study, is a striking example of this sea change. In 1990, fewer than 1,500 Hispanic individuals lived in Pine County, or about 2% of the population. This figure officially increased to more than 12,000 in 2012, which constituted 10.7% of the population. The Hispanic population in Pine County rose 89.52% from 2000 to 2010.

Pine County public schools' student population is predominantly comprised of minority students. The African-American population is 52%, and the White population has decreased to less than 20% of the students. Hispanic individuals make up 23% of the students, surpassing the White population. The largest change has been the dramatic expansion of the Mexican immigrant population. From 1990-2013, the number of Hispanic students in the Pine County schools rose from 149 to about 3,085 (data from Pine County school district documents). Approximately 90% of the English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) population is Spanish-speaking.

For a number of years, concerns have been raised regarding immigrant students' integration into the U.S. educational system. Specifically, Latino students have frequently been in the headlines because of alarming statistics on high school graduation rates. According to 2011 national figures, 82% of Latino students between ages 18-24 have a high school diploma or equivalent credential, compared to 90% of Black students and 94% of White students (U.S. Census Bureau, School Enrollment Supplement). In 2011, 14% of Hispanic/Latino 16-24 year olds were high school dropouts, while the rate was 5% for White students (NCES, 2013). The graduation rates for White students and Hispanic students were 83.0% and 71.4%, respectively (NCES, 2013). Young Hispanic college students are less likely than their white counterparts to enroll in a 4-year college (56% versus 72%).

Such statistics have accompanied extensive research from many theoretical perspectives that examine the perceived educational failure of Latino students. The combination of an extensive population shift and associated cultural changes has serious implications, not only for students, but also for local educators who try to work with families and teach all students. In this study, we took a closer look at some of these changes from the perspective of educators, a group whose voices are sometimes missing in the discourses on Latino students in the educational system.

From Deficit Models to Concerns with Conditions

For decades, much of the writing about Latino students and their schooling assigned responsibility for students' high dropout rates and academic difficulties to characteristics of family and culture. Valencia and Black (2002) reviewed the "cultural deprivation" literature of the 1960's and the "at risk" studies of the 1980's and 1990's, both of which were examples of a "deficit model" and found that for at risk students,

> the *primary* focus is on *familial* characteristics (e.g., race or ethnicity, poverty, single parenthood) and *personal* characteristics of students (e.g., poor self-concept, self-destructive behaviors, English as second language, juvenile delinquency. . . (p. 86; emphasis in original)

Writers have characterized Latino students as being uncommitted to education, lacking support from families in academic pursuits, and suffering hardships that make education of secondary importance. Author B (2013) found that teachers blamed unsupportive and uncaring parents for ELLs' lack of success. Valencia and Black (2002) and Alfaro et al. (2009) have attempted to debunk the "myth" that Latinos don't value education by describing numerous examples of students' and families' struggles to gain access to adequate schooling.

In the past several decades, researchers have paid more attention to the conditions of schools in order to describe the difficulties that Latino students experience there. This line of research has commonly emphasized misunderstandings due to language and other cultural mismatches (Birch & Ellis Ferrin, 2001), divergent expectations of teachers, students, and parents (Cammarota, 2006; Gibson, Gándara, & Koyama, 2004), and differing views of work and academics (Lopez, 2001; Orellana, 2001). According to Walker, Shafer, and Iiams (2004), "Local community contexts are large determinants in the extent and nature of societal attitudes" and "when teachers

internalize dominant societal messages, they bring them directly into their schools and classrooms" (p. 131). Walker et al. (2004) also investigated the effects of context on attitudes and found that teachers working in schools with few ELLs held positive, but perhaps naïve attitudes about ELLs, teachers in schools with a rapid influx of ELLs held neutral attitudes, and migrant-serving schools' teachers held the most negative attitudes toward ELLs. Educators' perspectives can profoundly influence interactions with students and their families.

The Importance of Educators' Perspectives

Student success and failure is often determined by their ability to form positive relationships with school personnel (Gonzalez, 2010). Villenas and Deyhle (1999) found in their review that teachers were key actors in Latino students' educational experiences, and the teachers appeared to harbor "low expectations" and "negative beliefs". Sharkey and Layzer (2000) found that the "benevolent conspiracy" of well-meaning teachers often produced low expectations for ELLs (p. 3). Teachers frequently attributed problems to students' families, whose values were compared unfavorably with those of White middle-class families. Quiroz (2001) indicated that by the time Latino students reached high school, they felt that teachers were "racist, or uninterested in their education" and their descriptions of school became less positive (p. 339). Blanchard (2011) found that educators are less likely to expect Latinos, especially immigrants and boys, to complete college. This is unfortunate because teacher support can significantly affect Latinos' school engagement and perception of school meaningfulness (Brewster & Bowen, 2004).

In the above studies, teachers appeared to project images held within society at large, but these gloomy depictions of how educators view Latino students are sometimes contradicted in other studies. Social assets, including supportive teachers, can positively affect school success of Latinos (Brewster & Bowen, 2004). Gonzalez (2010) found that close relationships with educators can help offset some negative effects of the undocumented status of Latino students,

while perceived discrimination against Latino boys is negatively related to academic motivation and success (Alfaro et al., 2009). In fact, a common thread among the studies is that many educators believe Latino students have a strong desire to succeed and are optimistic about teaching ELLs (Villenas & Deyhle, 1999; Author B, 2014). For example, Author B (2014) found the majority of teachers trusted that ELLs can master the required curriculum and believed that the inclusion of ELLs in mainstream classes benefited all students.

The situation is complex, but many Latino students attend schools in which teachers who lack intercultural preparation and a challenge to their prevailing attitudes may still resort to blaming student failure on cultural deficiencies. Some teachers are not adequately prepared to work with a linguistically diverse student population (American Federation of Teachers, 2004; Author B, 2014). Specifically for our study, the focus was on teachers' perceptions of their students and the students' families, in order to illuminate the complexity of those perceptions.

Method

Purpose and Design

The qualitative data in this report were drawn from a larger mixed-methods study evaluating the situation of students in the Pine County school district who speak a first language other than English. A group of teachers, other educators, professors, parents, and graduate students carried out a "local educational assessment of resources and needs" ("LEARN"). The research questions from the assessment were:

• What do teachers think about how well the language-minority students are doing in their classes and about students' school experiences?

• What are the most important needs of language-minority students in the schools, according to educators?

• How adequate is the communication between families and their children's school(s),

117

and among educational professionals who work with these students?

• What sort of community resources are educators aware of, and what resources do educators need in order to serve the needs of this population?

Of the 19 schools in the district, 6 target schools (4 elementary schools, 1 middle school, and 1 high school) were chosen to participate because they had the district's highest percentage of language-minority students at different grade levels. The 6 schools in our study enrolled 66% of the district total of language-minority students at the time. In the 4 elementary schools, the percentage of ESOL population ranged from 13.1% to 17.5%. The middle school had a 9.4% ESOL population and the high school 2.9%.

The educators who participated in our interviews were grouped according to shared professional membership categories: Classroom teachers, ESOL teachers, other professional staff (social workers and counselors), and administrators. This strategy has been found to increase participants' comfort with expressing their opinions, while also allowing participants more opportunities to feed off each others' responses (Bloor, Frankland, Thomas, & Robson; 2001; Morgan, 2002).

Data Collection

The LEARN team conducted 18 focus group interviews, each with 3-7 participants. Interviews were audiotaped and later transcribed. The interview moderators included ESOL teachers, regular classroom teachers, counselors, a Migrant Education worker, a bilingual Parent Liaison, a school social worker, a professor (also a parent), a graduate assistant, and the director of a local social agency. All moderators attended an orientation session before conducting the interviews. Each interview lasted 30-60 minutes. For this report, we focus only on interview data from 10 of the focus groups: 6 with "regular" teachers from each school in the study, 2 with ESOL teachers from across the district, 1 with principals district-wide, and 1 with professional staff (such

as counselors, nurses, and social workers) from two of the elementary schools.

Data Analysis

After transcribing the taped interviews, we collaboratively analyzed the data. To enhance the consistency of coding and interpretation we read the same transcripts and met to discuss parallel and discrepant patterns in the data. We initially worked inductively (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996) during an open-ended coding and categorization process (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998) to generate multiple categories for future coding.

In the first phase of the analysis, we focused solely on teachers' descriptions of students and families within different sets of interviews, and we compiled a list of all indicative quotes. In the second phase, we tried to categorize the images as negative or positive, but we found that the images expressed by educators were complicated and difficult to categorize in that manner. Quotes often seemed contradictory but were connected by related themes. Therefore, in a third phase, we re-examined the data by focusing our analysis on five themes that broadly represented educators' perceptions of Latino students and families: (1) students' and families' attitudes towards education; (2) students' and families' educational background; (3) work ethic; (4) family life; and (5) community life. Throughout the process, representative quotes were chosen to ensure that the coded categories and major themes were firmly situated in the words of participants. In the subsequent analysis of data, we code quotes in this way: PS for primary school teachers, MS for middle school teachers, HS for high school teachers, ES for ESOL teachers who were interviewed in mixed school groups, AD for administrators, and PP for other professional staff. Their words and perceptions follow.

Educators' Perceptions

Educators recognized that they often lacked a knowledge base about Latino students and families, and they gave many examples of the contextual factors (ineffective policies and

lack of resources) that made it difficult to fulfill their objectives. However, educators rarely questioned the values implicit in their images of Latino students and families. We now turn our attention to these images. The data are grouped according to educators' perceptions of: (1) students' and parents' attitudes toward education, (2) students' educational background, and (3) Latino families.

Perceptions of Students' and Parents' Attitudes toward Education

The views concerning students' attitudes toward education were often contradictory. Teachers seemed to see Latinos as respectful, but perhaps lacking in the assertiveness necessary for school success. In addition, teachers at times seemed to value the diversity that comes with bilingualism, but would also discuss the use of Spanish with negative connotations by referring to the "language barrier." Similarly, when discussing parents' attitudes toward education the views were mixed. Teachers believed that parents were supportive of school to an extent, but felt that Latinos lacked positive role models to encourage them to stay in school. These three categories of conflicting perceptions of educators about students' and parents' attitudes toward education are discussed in the following paragraphs.

"The sweetest children in my class." In classroom interactions, teachers described Latino students as very "sociable," "cooperative," and "group oriented in many ways." (HS). ESOL teachers, especially, described Latino students as friendly and willing to "appreciate you when they realize you are on their side." In these accounts, students are depicted as good "role models" for American students: "I think, generally speaking, most students from other backgrounds, other than native-born Americans, tend to have more respect for teachers. And I think that's good for the other students to see that the respect is there" (HS).

The polite social nature and positive attitude of students was, however, perceived as problematic at times. One teacher complained

that respect for teachers and attempts to fulfill expectations were actually obstacles in students' development, since these traits would hide any learning difficulties that students were experiencing. She explained:

[A] lot of times they will just smile at you politely or just be real polite, but you know deep down that they don't understand anything of what you're saying. And I think that's just part of their culture to be polite to the teacher and be very respectful. (MS)

Regular classroom teachers believed that students had to "learn assertiveness" and tell teachers about "what is going on" (PS). In a similar vein, teachers correlated Latino students' strong cooperative working style and sociability with negative classroom behaviors such as "getting off task," or coming to school simply "to see friends, and not wanting to do schoolwork" (MS). Latino students were perceived to be at a disadvantage because their collective values interfered with a drive toward individual achievement.

"The language barrier." Educators appreciated the linguistic diversity that Latino students brought with them. However, although some teachers had begun to learn Spanish, and many ESOL teachers were bilingual, a theme in educators' discussions of bilingualism was what they referred to metaphorically as "the language barrier." Across all interviews, the lack of a fully shared language was described as a root problem, which left little room for other explanations such as the difficulties of students' adjustment or the inadequacy of educators' help. Using Spanish during school hours was often discouraged. Even though teachers did not know the content of students' conversations when students reverted to Spanish while working together, this behavior was described as troublesome.

Most educators did not see bilingualism as a possible resource rather than as an assumed deficiency. One teacher, for example, said of her Latino students: "If they are highly motivated, and they can somewhat compensate for their language deficits, they do well" (MS). An ESOL

teacher said that when "the kids don't know how to read or write in their native language" they may become "semi-lingual" and risk feeling that "you don't fit anywhere," neither in the "English school life" nor "Spanish [*sic*] school life" (ES). Despite the requests for resources in Spanish for their Latino students, many educators viewed these materials as a means to obtain fluency in English rather than as a way to maintain the first language.

There were countervailing viewpoints. Some of the social workers and ESOL teachers worried that people in the district were not "tolerant of people that speak another language." Several ESOL teachers explicitly criticized an "English only" approach to learning, and promoted the idea of a dual-immersion bilingual program in English and Spanish.

"Supportive, but bad role models."
Parent support is vital to students' success in school. Some of the educators had directly encountered Latino families, and they found that parents willingly supported the school and the teachers' objectives. On one occasion, Latino parents supported a school by collecting a large sum of money to hire a band for a celebratory "heritage night." Administrators also reported that parental involvement was increasing, indicating a positive parental attitude toward school (AD).

On the other hand, educators' perceptions were fraught with ambivalence and conflicting feelings. Although educators did not believe that parents directly resisted schooling, there was a prevalent belief that students lacked role models for academic success at home (MS). Another teacher stated: "[M]aybe that could be something, some kind of goal that we could aim for, to educate and communicate to our parents that it's important that their children stay in school and finish school and not just quit and get a job" (MS). In a similar vein, a principal said:

We still have some cultural values that -- and I don't want to say equate to not caring about education, that's not it. They care lots about education until the child's a certain age, and then at that point, in that culture, the person needs to

be doing something else, not being in school. (AD)

Educators were reluctant to blame individual students or parents. Instead, students and parents were positioned as part of a cultural group with an inadequate educational background.

Perceptions of Educational Background

Unlike the conflicting positive and negative perceptions educators seemed to hold about students' and parents' attitude toward education, the educator's perceptions of the educational backgrounds of Latinos was consistently negative. Educators tended to view Latino students' (and parents') prior schooling as flawed or even non-existent. One teacher explained how she struggled with "instilling" the right kind of values in her Latino students:

> Keeping the standards high. The fact that they have to do their homework, they've got to put an effort on their homework like everybody else. And if they don't have it then you have to do study hall, but after a while they learn that "no more, no play." And all my little Spanish *(sic)* children at the beginning of the year didn't do their homework, except for maybe a couple that did. (PS)

An ESOL teacher asserted that poor teaching in Mexico was to blame: "I have a first grader that came in copying very well. She does not know how to write or anything, but she can copy somebody else upside down and backwards across from her on the table. That's the skill she was taught in school" (ES).

Some educators seemed unaware of the social class differences among Latino immigrants, or that families emigrating from South America generally have higher levels of income and education than families from Mexico or Central America:

> And I have found -- what do y'all think of this? A lot of times the South American Peruvians and the Argentines

120

and the Brazilians do better than the children in Mexico on a lot of the stuff. Seems like their educational system might have been a little more advanced. (PS)

Parents were commonly portrayed as illiterate and unable to provide help, even in their native language. Across interviews, there was a widespread belief that despite some effort, Latino parents still did not possess a strong, overarching commitment to education. A teacher summarized this view by saying: "[S]ome cultures seem to value education more than others. My Asian students just always seem to – parents especially put a high value, maybe too high, you know, on grades, for instance" (HS).

Teachers' beliefs about Latino students' and parents' educational attitudes and backgrounds were often entangled in perceptions of parents' work ethic. Work and education were juxtaposed as two fundamentally different and conflicting activities. This view of work and education being at odds with each other is also apparent in the next section of educators' perceptions of Latino families.

Perceptions of Latino Families

Just as educators had mixed views about students' and parents' attitudes toward education, participants' discussions of Latino families were also peppered with both positive and negative perceptions. Educators appreciated the close-knit families in the Latino culture, but believed education should sometimes come before family. Similarly, educators admired the work ethic of many Latinos while simultaneously looking down on the families who forced the children to do housework instead of use their imagination to play. These two themes of close families and the importance of work over education, along with the purely negative view of poverty in Latino culture will be the focus in the following section.

"Just us on our own." Across all interviews, participants saw Latino families as close and caring. ESOL teachers, especially, talked extensively about the positive influence of this closeness on the children:

The other thing that would be so good I think for our teachers is the whole affirming of family that you could hear in that room yesterday, as the kids were talking about what happens, and parents and fathers, and the importance of the priest. All of the things that we tend to, from our prejudice, not see in people who are different from us. . . (ES)

Despite the positive values that a close-knit family provided, teachers suspected that parents did not really support and care for their children in the proper ways. Students were characterized as having no access to "printed material" and as living in "crowded houses" with up to "15 kids in a family." One teacher said: "They don't have much of the sight word and those kinds of things that I would think they would have acquired had they been in a culture that would give them more of the reading" (MS). Several educators stated that immigrants set the wrong priorities, always placing the family first:

The kids stay home for all sorts. . . Then there are some other cultural things. There was one thing, that she missed one more day she would lose credit for the class -- and she understood it very clear -- and then she was absent the whole next week working in Miami, and of course it was their culture. (HS)

"Always working, but with the wrong priorities." Numerous accounts of parents' hard work described their struggles to survive and support family and relatives by holding several jobs simultaneously. Educators admired the Latino parents' determination, but believed that labor had a dangerous downside for students' academic achievement. An elementary ESOL teacher asserted:

Parents don't have time. They are always working. One parent is working so that they don't have to pay for day care, they have got the split shift. One parent is home and is probably asleep with the children there, but what are the children doing? Are they being told, "OK, now it's homework time?" No!

It's: "Clean the house, let's make sure the laundry gets done, let's do this, this". . . (ES)

Another teacher described how her Latino students had no conceptual understanding about things outside the "real concrete" life of work and other basic survival needs:

I was reading a book to him, to the group, and it had some imagination in there, like a mouse who talks, that lives under a house. And he said: "How can a mouse live under, how can a family live under?" And I said, "Well, it's imagination." [H]e was like, "That's not -- how can that happen?" They have so much knowledge about the real world, the things that happen, and they know so much about other stuff that they don't know their book is fictional. (ES)

By being forced to take on many adult responsibilities, the teachers worried that play and children's activities were neglected. The educators' views implied a dichotomous relationship between valuing and performing hard (manual) labor, as represented by the Latino family, and valuing academic achievement, as represented by the school world.

"Climbing through the drainpipe."

Educators portrayed the Latino community as being in a state of crisis, with few resources and numerous social problems such as poor health and poverty. There was a widespread belief that many families had come here illegally by "climbing through the drainpipe," and therefore were unlikely to seek support. Educators believed that Latino students often came to school "hungry and dirty," and thus were less able to learn. One teacher said: "You're not going to have an achiever if everything's not okay, if they're not fed, if they're not clothed, if they're living in, you know, chaos." (ES)

Comments such as these reflect how educators' perspectives of economics and culture were closely interwoven. Absenteeism and other obstacles to academic success were, in general, attributed to home culture and problems in the Latino community, whether or not educators had correct information.

The Interplay of Self-Reflection and Assumption

Teachers, administrators, and professional staff drew a complex picture of Latino students and families. The faculty talked extensively about issues related to cultural differences, which they perceived as problematic for students' academic achievement. Some of the "problems" related to characteristics that were initially described positively. Educators' perceptions of Latino families and their lifestyles rarely derived from direct contact with the immigrant families in their community, and information regarding Latino families was often stereotypical. Although educators bemoaned their lack of knowledge, criticized constraints that affected Latino students, and offered numerous suggestions to remedy the perceived problems, there was scant self-reflection about Latino families' values and lifestyles. Latino students' participation in household activities, their help with translation, and their paid labor were all taken as signs of parents' lack of support for children's academic development. This corresponds with what a teacher participant in Author B's study said: "I don't think they are real strict about making them go to school down there. You can quit school when you are like 9 or something" (2013, p. 16). These views reflect educators' failure to examine their own assumptions about school systems in Mexico and other Latin American countries.

Professional Learning

Professional learning has been shown to have a positive impact on teachers of ELLs. For example, Author B (2011a) found that teachers who had received pre-service education in teaching ELLs were more prepared to help ELLs understand class materials and were less likely to believe that if students can speak English fluently with their friends, they should be able to understand the course content as well as others. Improved programs, resources, and staffing are necessary to change the conditions of educators' work, but not sufficient to alter people's points

of view. How do we enable educators to examine what they know and do not know about the values, beliefs, and experiences of students and families?

We will group professional learning into three overlapping tiers, which differ in relation to the depth of challenging experiences. First, an *intercultural information* approach draws on Barajas and Ronnkvist's (2007) suggestions for color-conscious rather than color-blind thinking. Next, educators might use an *intercultural inquiry* approach in order to interact with and address problems in their communities. Finally, *intercultural immersion* can be used to engage educators with families through home visits, or with foreign communities.

Intercultural information builds on the positive views of educators toward their students, and engages educators in classes, workshops, or in-school projects that promote greater understanding of cultural issues. Trumbull, Rothstein-Fisch, Greenfield, and Quiroz (2001), in their "Bridging Cultures" work, built a dualistic conceptual framework that asked teachers to compare a collectivist and an individual orientation to life. Similarly, Cammarota (2006) found that Latino students had difficulties in school because of their negative relationships with school personnel and called for a compassionate education in which learning is connected with genuine care and concern that includes knowledge of students and their families. Educators working with Mexican immigrant children should also be cognizant of resources such as the Migrant Education Binational Program and information about children's schooling in Mexico (Author A, 2003; Author A & Bryan, 2003; Bryan & Author A, 2005).

Intercultural information can also be enhanced through consistent communication between regular classroom teachers and ESOL teachers, counselors, social workers, and administrators. As Yoon (2008) states, "Teaching ELLs is not a responsibility of only ESL teachers but also of classroom teachers" (p. 516). Educators in our study wanted more time for regular and ESOL teachers to talk about

particular students, more information about ESOL policies and practices in regular classrooms, and "Spanish for Teachers" courses. Many school districts have talented and knowledgeable ESOL teachers who could develop ongoing workshops for their colleagues, rather than utilizing the common staff development practice of hiring outside experts to conduct one-day workshops. Release time to visit other schools and to develop the workshops would be necessary for this to happen. He, Prater, and Steed (2011) were successful in creating a research-based, needs-oriented professional development model for teachers of ELLs that included collaboration between university and schools districts, as well as between ESOL and regular classroom teachers.

In an *intercultural inquiry* approach, educators would develop research projects with colleagues and gather data from students' out-of-school linguistic and social experiences. These data need to be relevant to the teachers and authentically indicative of students' lives. An inquiry approach to professional development has been shown to improve teachers' practice through demonstration, observation, collaboration, fieldwork, and reflection (Burke, 2013). Nieto believes that educators should become "students of their students," to learn <u>about</u>, <u>with</u>, and <u>for</u> their students and wrote eloquently about "multicultural learning communities" (1999, p. 142). Gonzalez et al. (2013) wrote about engaging educators in projects where they use anthropological methods to learn about students' culture and the "funds of knowledge" by learning in the community. Moll believes that educators need to reflect on how they "come to depict these families for themselves, for their work, and for other educators" (2010, p. 455). An administrator in our study stated that the crucial point is for educators to learn <u>from</u> the Latino population. She said:

> These children and these families have so much to share with us -- and we're so intent on making sure that we teach them about how to be here and how to work in our culture, that we're not listening enough to what they have to

offer us and what we have to learn from them about themselves. (AD)

This sort of work can help teachers to see beyond presumed "language barriers" and to question their perceptions of what they know and do not know. Such questioning is important because, as Author B stated, "although training and professional development are critical, they need to be focused on belief change in order to be effective" (2011, p. 130). Such activity should be paired with closer investigations of language learning and cultural adaptation to change (for immigrants and their teachers), so that we can counteract lingering stigmatizing views of "other" children. He, Prater, and Steed (2011) believe that teachers working with ELLs need not just knowledge of language and culture, but skills in collaboration, leadership, and critical reflection. Given our powerful assumptions about culture and education, educators need to create ways to talk face-to-face with parents and students outside of regular school hours and classroom sites. Such "cultural conversations" could allow educators to inquire about students' prior educational experiences, allow parents to talk about their educational expectations, and allow both parties to ask questions that are rarely broached.

Intercultural immersion is an uncommon and potentially dramatic form of professional learning about students, families, the communities in which students live – and oneself (Diaz, 2013). Barajas and Ronnkvist (2007) state that "recognizing race is not the problem; the problem is being willing to recognize what we are doing, and then creating relationships that support a socially just educational organization" (p. 1536). By "immersion" we do not imply living with people; the intent is to connect in a deeper way with children and families. Some experiences are local, and take the form of community gatherings and home visits. Moll (2010) advocates for ethnographic-style home visits in order to establish relations of trusts between families and teachers for developing "educational capital" (p. 455). A pattern of home visits, family dinners hosted by school parents that bring together parents and teachers to talk

across the table, and events held in a local community center could be arranged by a team of faculty and administrators, aided by a bilingual school social worker and a small group of parents. This would enable parents to feel more comfortable talking and would help educators to learn about family and community life.

There are also opportunities for educators to live in a host community or another country. For example, a number of programs have taken educators to Mexico, primarily foreign language teachers and bilingual teachers. Indiana University has outstanding programs for pre-service experiences on the US-Mexican border or in other countries, and there have been successful professional development abroad program for U.S. educators in Mexico (Author A, Hotch, & Sargent, 2002) and other sites. Sleeter (2001) found that community-based cross-cultural immersion experiences produced a considerable power of learning from the community. Such *intercultural immersion* programs create an experiential space that challenges us to see, hear, and think in a different form than is possible in our everyday lives.

Conclusion

School professionals need to learn more about "Latino cultures, specifically about practices and interventions that are effective for the educational achievement and attainment of Latino youth" (Brewster & Bowen, 2004, p. 63). Our hope is that school leaders will think broadly about the possibilities available to encourage the deepest and most long-lasting positive change among faculty.

"The public school has been one of the most important institutions in the lives of immigrant children, wielding the power to either replicate societal inequalities or equalize the field" (Gonzalez, 2010). To reach toward the positive "equalizing" potential of public education for immigrant Latino children, it is urgent that we develop powerful ways to overcome stereotyped images of Latino students

and families, through intercultural information, inquiry, and immersion.

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126

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[1] Hispanic is the Census Bureau's term, which has been criticized because it refers only to Spanish speakers (Suárez-Orozco & Páez, 2002). When not citing census data, we will use the term "Latino," which we take to indicate "the broadest, most inclusive, and most generous definition of Latinos: that segment of the U.S. population that traces its descent to the Spanish-speaking, Caribbean, and Latin American worlds," as suggested by Suárez-Orozco and Páez in their 2002 book *Latinos Remaking America*.

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