CHAPTER 9

The Educational Experiences of Latinos in the United States

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INTRODUCTION

The educational conditions of Latinos in the United States in the first decade of the 21st century can be described only with a sense of alarm, given the dismal statistics we can use to capture attainment levels. For example, in 2003 only about half (48.7%) of the Mexican- and the Dominican-origin (51.7%) population (25 years and older) had completed at least a high school education (Falcon, 2004). This compares with just over three-fifths (63.3%) of Puerto Ricans and 68.7% of Cubans completing a high school education, which means that all of the major Latino subgroups were lagging behind the majority White-population high school completion rate of 84% by a wide margin.

The historical context under which the Latino educational situation has developed in the United States is very complex and can be summarized under relations of subjugation, colonization, and the specific institutional mechanisms used in different locations to segregate and track Latino students. Latinos have struggled for more than a century to preserve their "raices" (cultural roots) in the face of a public educational system embarked on an "Americanization" mission, obsessed with erasing the Spanish language and any historical connections to Latin America (Garcia, 2001). The schooling of Latinos is frequently discussed under the umbrella of "immigrant" adaptation and bilingual education, even though the majority of U.S. Latinos were born in the continental United States (Bean, Lee, Batalova, & Leach, 2004) and their first language is English. However, emphasis on comparing the native-born with immigrants reflects a desire to see the second and third generation outpace the educational and occupational gains of their parents and grandparents, with specific attention to returns on educational credentials.

For example, Bean et al. (2004) reported that full-time workers of Mexican origin were earning about 30% less than U.S.-born White males, irrespective of education level. However, when the comparison is made to U.S.-born Mexican workers, the differences shrink considerably, although White workers with at least some college education still make 21% more than comparable Mexican workers, suggesting the presence of discriminatory labor markets.

This chapter is organized as follows: In the next section I outline some of the major historical events that have shaped the educational experiences of Latinos in this country. The following section covers some of the most relevant factors or variables behind the educational attainment of Latinos at both the secondary and postsecondary level. The final section contains recommendations for future research in light of more recent developments (e.g., the No Child Left Behind Act) at the state and federal levels.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Mexican Americans

In the 19th century, the recently independent nation of Mexico lost close to half of its territory to the United States. As a result, many Mexicans in the southwest found themselves in a subordinate position within a vastly expanding United States, which had promised equal protection under the law, including private property and language rights in the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo signed with Mexico in 1848. As Anglos consolidated their political and economic power throughout the region, they extended their dominance in the cultural domain by restricting the use of Spanish. In Texas, for example, the state legislature passed a new school law in 1870 mandating English as the language of instruction in all schools. Coupled with widespread poverty and poor public school facilities, the new law made schooling unavailable for most Mexican children in the state (Velez, 1994).

More wealthy *Tejanos* had access to religious institutions and private Mexican schools, like the Incarnate Word of Brownsville, established in 1853 by four nuns, that enrolled females between 5 and 18 years of age (San Miguel, 1987). For poor *Tejano* parents, however, public schools were the only alternative. In a pattern that would be repeated for many decades, these schools were usually segregated, overcrowded, and lacked adequately trained staff and school equipment.

In the early 20th century, the decline of the cattle industry coupled with the development of commercial agriculture led to a system of exploitative wages and extreme segregation practices in Texas and other southwestern states. The Mexican Revolution that started in 1910 and the loss of communal lands that affected millions of peasants in that country led to a substantial increase in Mexican immigration to the United States between the years 1900 and 1930. Rampant use of child labor and the denial of schooling by many boards of education to migrant children meant that the majority of Mexican migrant children never went beyond the primary grades in Texas (Warburton, Wood, & Crane, 1943). Curricular reforms began in the 1920s aimed at providing Mexican children in Texas with vocational education (San Miguel, 1987). Agriculture classes, industrial training, and home economics instruction were widely offered to these children by 1929. Thus, schools were used to train Mexican Americans to be domestics and farm hands and to occupy the lower rungs of the manufacturing sector.

In response to these discriminatory conditions, the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) was founded in 1929. The organization's constitution declared that one of its

aims was "to assume complete responsibility for the education of our children as to their rights and duties and the language and customs of this country; the latter insofar as they may be good customs" (cited in Montejano, 1987). Over the years, LULAC has won many important legal victories to secure political and educational rights for Latinos. Perhaps the most well-known legal victory resulted from LULAC coming to the aid of several MexicanAmericans that were challenging the practice of school segregation in California. The suit, known as *Mendez v. Westminster School District*, charged that a number of school districts in Orange County were denying Mexican and Latino children their constitutional rights by forcing them to attend separate "Mexican" schools. On February 18, 1946, the court ruled against the district, and under appeal, the decision was upheld 14 months later, on April 14, 1947. This was a very important victory from a legal standpoint, because the court reinterpreted the Plessy "separate but equal" doctrine. The presiding judge, Paul J. McCormick, made a distinction between physical equality (facilities) and social equality. The existence of separate facilities was unconstitutional because it fostered social inequality. Moreover, McCormick found no evidence that showed segregation aided in the development of English proficiency. Thus, he ruled that the segregation of Mexican children lacked legal and educational justifications (González, 1990).

Another organization that fought for educational equity is the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund (MALDEF). One of the primary concerns of MALDEF was eliminating segregated schools for Mexican Americans. MALDEF went to court to challenge the federal government's practice, through the Office for Civil Rights, of treating Mexican Americans as White, thus allowing some school districts to appear to have "integrated" schools by pairing Blacks with Mexican Americans while leaving the all-Anglo schools intact. In order to change this, MALDEF sought court decisions declaring Mexican Americans an identifiable ethnic minority group that had been subjected to a system of pervasive official discrimination. The crucial decision was rendered by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1973 in *Keyes v. School District Number One, Denver, Colorado*, declaring Mexican Americans an identifiable minority for desegregation purposes.

More recent attempts to deny education to immigrant children have also reached the U.S. Supreme Court. In *Plyler v. Doe*, 1982, the Supreme Court rejected an attempt by one school district in Texas to exclude Mexican immigrant students from public school altogether. The Supreme Court found such exclusion unconstitutional. In 1994, California voters approved Proposition 187, which attempted to cut off social services, including public education, to undocumented immigrant families and children. In March 1998, a federal district judge found Proposition 187 unconstitutional. The reasoning behind the Supreme Court's decision on this issue revolves around the equal protection clause, which was intended to cover any person physically within a state's borders regardless of the legality of his/her presence. As Garcia (2001) stated, "denying children an education would make them illiterate and would prevent them from advancing on their individual merit and becoming useful members of U.S. society."

Integration by itself could not guarantee equal educational opportunity for all Mexican American children, because many of them were monolingual Spanish speakers and could not be integrated into the regular classroom. It was necessary to address the special needs of these children by implementing a new curriculum, one that was designed to deal with linguistic minorities. The crucial legal decision that paved the way for demanding bilingual programs was the 1974 Supreme Court ruling in the *Lau v. Nichols* case. The court ruled that bilingual education was to be provided to facilitate equal access to the instructional program of students who were English learners.

Bilingual education has proved to be an arena for persistent debate and controversy both among Latinos and non-Latinos. Although most research supports the educational benefits of

bilingual programs for Spanish-speaking children (Garcia, 1999), political pressure against it has developed in some areas of the country. In 1998, for example, California voters passed Proposition 227, an initiative outlawing most forms of bilingual education, with about 40% of Latinos supporting the initiative. It made bilingual education available only through parental requests and prescribed a 1-year course called "Structured English Immersion." However, without assistance using their native language, it is very improbable that immigrant children can acquire English effectively. Moreover, evidence on the effects of Proposition 227 shows widespread failure in its ability to allow these immigrants to become proficient in English. In the academic year 2002–2003, 5 years after the implementation of Proposition 227 in California, only 42% (of the total population in 1998) of English language learners had become proficient in English (Crawford, 2003).

Puerto Ricans

Puerto Ricans became politically linked to the United States as a result of the Treaty of Paris, which ended the Spanish American War in 1898, with Spain ceding Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Pacific territories of the Philippines and Guam to the United States. Puerto Ricans have been U.S. citizens since 1917, when Congress passed the Jones-Shafroth Act. Since 1952, the political status of Puerto Rico is that of a commonwealth, and although retaining some local autonomy, Puerto Rican affairs have been closely controlled by U.S. business interests and federal agencies.

Most of the initial U.S. colonial policies were based on prejudiced and patronizing views of the Puerto Rican people, aimed at Americanizing the Island (Acosta-Belén & Santiago, 2006). The school system was forced to adopt English as the language of instruction, and the Island's schools were used to inculcate U.S. values and promote the learning of English (Negrón de Montilla, 1971).

As part of their forced acculturation mission, U.S. administrators of Puerto Rico sent 60 Puerto Rican students to the Carlisle Indian Industrial School in Pennsylvania between 1898 and 1905. The school had been founded in 1879 with the goal of erasing the cultural identity of American Indian children and acculturating them into U.S. western society (Navarro-Rivera, 2006). The Puerto Rican students and their families had been deceived into thinking that they would receive a professional education at Carlisle, and most were disappointed with its Americanizing and vocationally oriented curriculum. As a result, many students returned to Puerto Rico on the orders of their parents, and at least five Puerto Rican students ran away from the school (Navarro-Rivera, 2006).

Puerto Ricans first migrated to the United States in the second half of the 19th century as a result of political persecution from the colonial Spanish authorities. The majority of these political migrants settled in New York, as did many of the Puerto Ricans migrating to the United States in the first three decades of the 20th century. By 1940, there were about 70,000 Puerto Ricans living in the United States, having formed communities in East Harlem, the Brooklyn Navy Yard Area, the South Bronx, and the Lower East Side in New York. Economic and political transformations in Puerto Rico aimed at industrializing the Island's economy were accompanied by a government-sponsored plan to facilitate the migration of Puerto Rican surplus workers in what is called the "great migration" during the 1946–1964 period (Alicea, 1994). Although Puerto Ricans are now geographically dispersed throughout the United States, they remained heavily concentrated in the New York area until the 1970s.

The initial reaction of school officials in New York City to the increasing enrollments of Puerto Rican students in the postwar period was a forced immersion approach. Under community

pressure, the New York City Board of Education decided to undertake a study in 1954. The study, known as the "Puerto Rican Study," lasted 3 years, and in its final report, it recommended proper screening, placement, and periodic assessment of non-English-speaking children (Santiago-Santiago, 1986). These recommendations were ignored; they were never implemented at the system level, leaving it at the discretion of the local schools to follow them.

The abysmal failure of the city's schools to educate and graduate its Puerto Rican students was reflected in their large dropout rates, estimated at between 80% and 85% throughout the 1960s (Vélez, 1994). By 1969, Puerto Ricans constituted 22% of the student population but filled less than 1% of all teacher and guidance positions. Parental demands and community activism led to the creation of three experimental school districts in New York City by the late 1960s: Independent School 201, Two Bridges, and Ocean-Hill Brownsville. These districts had large representations of Puerto Rican students, and one of the first bilingual programs established without state or federal support was set up as a mini-school in Ocean-Hill Brownsville in 1968 (Fuentes, 1980).

When it became clear that the Board of Education had taken inadequate measures to meet the needs of Puerto Rican children, as yet another study (Jenkins, 1971) had conclusively demonstrated, Aspira of New York, a nonprofit educational agency, decided to litigate. In 1972, the Puerto Rican Legal Defense Fund filed a suit on behalf of Aspira of New York (*Aspira v. Board of Education of the City of New York*). The suit persuasively argued that Puerto Rican children had been denied their right to equal educational opportunity by the board as a function of their ethnicity and language. It also petitioned to implement a bilingual educational program. This suit resulted in the Aspira Consent Decree, signed by both parties on August 29, 1974 (Santiago-Santiago, 1978).

Bilingual education and the decentralization of New York City's schools was not an effective remedy for the high dropout rates affecting Puerto Rican students in that city. First, many language-minority children were still being denied bilingual education after 10 years under the consent decree (Educational Priorities Panel, 1985). Also, second- and third-generation Puerto Rican students were more negatively influenced by educational practices like tracking and the combined effects of low educational expectations and inadequate facilities (National Commission of Secondary Education of Hispanics, 1984).

Because they hold citizenship status and because they frequently engage in circulatory migration patterns, Puerto Ricans are a unique case requiring targeted attention from educators and policy makers. Grosfoguel, Negrón-Muntaner, and Georas (1997), in their explanation of this legacy of colonialism and how it impacts Puerto Ricans' situation in the United States, classified them as an "increasingly deterritorialized ethno-nation" (p. 19). Walsh (2002) suggested that the resistance of many White school administrators to acknowledge cultural differences and the assumption of a colonial attitude toward Puerto Rican students and their parents are at the root of the poor education received by this community in the nation's schools.

Cubans

The origins of the Cuban presence in the United States dates back to the first half of the 19th century when about 1,000 Cubans moved to cities such as New Orleans, Philadelphia, and New York. Expanding commercial ties between Cuba and the United States attracted professionals and merchants and a growing dissatisfaction with Spain's colonial system brought political exiles into the United States at various points during that century. Cuban-owned cigar factories were established in Florida to avoid the import tariffs on cigars and fueled the out-migration of cigar

workers from Havana and western Cuba. The domination of Cuban economic and political affairs by the United States in the first half of the 20th century also led to steady migratory steams in the 1940s and 1950s as Cubans fled political violence and a deteriorating economic situation; most of them came to New York and Miami (Poyo & Díaz-Miranda, 1994).

However, it is the two migration waves known as the "Golden Exiles" and the "Marielitos" that set the stage for the social, political, and economic assimilation of Cubans in South Florida in the last four decades of the 20th century. About 270,000 Cubans escaped the socialist government of Fidel Castro between 1959 and 1962; their composition was mostly representative of the socio-economic elite and the middle classes, and they received generous economic support from the United States. In contrast, the so-called "Marielitos," who came in 1980 (about 124,000), were primarily male and of working-class background and were racially diverse, but, most importantly, they were portrayed in the media as dangerous criminals and "social deviants" (Garcia, 1996).

In their quest for establishing a strong ethnic community in South Florida, Cubans built an ethnic enclave that at first emphasized an exile identity enveloped by Cuban nationalism obsessed with overthrowing Castro's government. A key ingredient for creating the enclave was to nurture *Cubanidad* (Cubanness), and one of the most important vehicles to accomplish this was the founding of dozens of small private schools in Miami and Hialeah that became known as *las escuelitas Cubanas* (the little Cuban schools). Taking advantage of the expulsion of the Jesuit priests that were running Havana's best private schools, Cuban exiles reopened schools (closed by Castro) such as LaSalle and Loyola (Garcia, 1996). The most renowned of these private schools was Belén Jesuit, founded in Cuba in 1854. In 1961, the Belen Jesuit School started operations in downtown Miami; and in 1981, the now called Belen Jesuit Preparatory School moved to an impressing facility in the southwest Miami suburbs. What sets these private schools apart, in addition to their academic rigor, is a strong emphasis on developing bilingual skills in Spanish and English.

In trying to model the school performance of native-born children of foreign parents, Portes and Rumbaut (2001) concluded that the pre-Mariel Cuban children had better grades and test scores than the Mariel and post-Mariel children. They also found a causal relationship between attending private bilingual schools and becoming a fluent bilingual. Females and students living in more affluent homes were also more likely to become fluent bilinguals. Thus, the earlier success of the Golden Exiles allowed them to create the right conditions (e.g., bilingual schools) for a privileged group of children to succeed educationally, but this advantage was not passed on to Cuban children whose parents came in more recent periods.

Due to their more privileged background and more positive government reception, Cubans have one of the highest levels of educational attainment among Latino subgroups. In 2000, for example, approximately one of every five (21%) adult Cubans had a college degree, much higher than the college attainment levels of Puerto Ricans and Mexicans (12.5% and 7.5%, respectively; see Acosta-Belén & Santiago, 2006).

Central Americans

As a result of civil war and government repression in their countries of origin, Central Americans began arriving in large numbers in the United States during the 1970s and 1980s. In the Los Angeles region, for example, the number of foreign-born Salvadorans went from 4,800 in 1970 to 241,509 in 1990 (Sabagh & Bozorgomehr, 1996). The Los Angeles neighborhoods of Pico Union and Westlake have the largest concentrations of Central Americans, where you can find churches,

businesses, and community-based organizations catering to the needs of this population. Arriving with limited English skills, of mostly peasant and working-class background, and with high rates of undocumented status (especially Salvadorans and Guatemalans), these young immigrants have very low levels of educational attainment. Only 3% of Salvadorans and 4% of Guatemalans (ages 25–64) in the Los Angeles region had a college degree in 1990, compared to 12% of other Central Americans and 24 % of the rest of the population (Lopez, Popkin, & Telles, 1996).

An ethnographic study of Central American immigrant adolescents conducted by Suarez-Orozco (1989) revealed a strong belief in the value of schooling for achieving economic mobility as well as a strong desire to graduate from high school and pursue college studies. In their study of second-generation eighth- and ninth-grade students (in South Florida), Portes and Zhou (2005) found that about four of every five Nicaraguan students aspired to a college education or higher.

Through the efforts of Central American activists in Los Angeles, a number of refugee service organizations were developed in the 1980s, and some of these, like the Central American Refugee Center, have developed programs to help students in the local schools. For example, following the 1992 riots in Los Angeles, CARECEN launched the Nueva Generación program, which provided tutoring and computer training as well as internships for high school students (Hamilton & Chinchilla, 2001). In 1997, CARECEN joined the Los Angeles Bridge program, a coalition of local community organizations, and was able to provide bilingual tutoring in math and other subjects, art workshops, and training in computer skills for students in the Berendo Middle School located in the Westlake district (Hamilton & Chinchilla, 2001).

The educational outlook for Central American students is heavily dependent on the quality and the policies of the Los Angeles Unified School system. However, the Los Angeles Board of Education changed the graduation requirements in 2003, requiring students to pass a year of algebra and a year of geometry or an equivalent class to earn a high school diploma. There is increasing evidence that Central American students are having great difficulties in passing their algebra classes, and as a result, their dropout rates are very high (Helfand, 2006).

Dominicans

Political and economic ties between the Dominican Republic and the United States go back to the 19th century, including military interventions and massive investments in the country by American business interests (Grasmuck & Pessar, 1991). Mass migration to the United States began in the early 1960s, and by 1998, there were an estimated 412,000 foreign-born Dominicans residing in New York City (Foner, 2000). The disappearance of manufacturing jobs and fierce competition for jobs from other immigrant groups in New York City has led to high unemployment and poverty rates among Dominicans (Pessar & Graham, 2001). Dominicans have the lowest educational levels of the major Latino subgroups (Falcon, 2004).

Increasing geographical concentrations in Washington Heights and other parts of northern Manhattan and parts of the South Bronx meant living in neighborhoods characterized by overcrowded housing and schools, as well as exposure to drug-related violence and poorly maintained parks and physical facilities. However, as a consequence of their relative high segregation, Dominicans have been able to mobilize along ethnic lines to achieve local representation and empowerment. In 1991, Guillermo Linares was the first Dominican elected to the New York City Council (Pessar, 1995), and in 1996, Dominican-born Adriano Espaillat was elected to the New York State Assembly as the representative from District 72 in northern Manhattan (Pessar & Graham, 2001).

By the early 1980s, Dominicans made up the majority of students in New York's Community School District 6 (in the Washington Heights neighborhood), at that time home to the city's most overcrowded schools. It was then that the Community Association of Progressive Dominicans confronted the school board and superintendent to demand bilingual education and other services for recently arrived immigrant families. The concerted efforts of community organizations, a parents' network throughout the district, and an aggressive voter registration drive led to greater Dominican representation on neighborhood school boards (and a majority in District 6). As a result, bilingual programs were started, new schools were constructed in the district, and, in 1994, a Dominican was appointed principal of a community high school where three-quarters of the student body was of Dominican origin (Pessar, 1995). Examples of schools serving immigrant students include the Gregorio Luperon High School for Science & Mathematics and the Twenty-First Century Academy (P.S. 210; K–6), both of which have partnerships with Dominican community organizations.

Dominican students are the largest Latino subgroup in New York City's public school at a time when Latinos have the highest dropout rate of the major ethnic/racial groups in the city's schools (see New York City Department of Education, 2005). However, signs of hope for those born in the United States are present in the study done by Hernandez and Rivera-Batiz (2003), who found that second-generation Dominicans had higher college attainment levels than other Latino groups in the country. They found that, in the year 2000, 22% of U.S.-born Dominicans (25 years of age or older) had completed a college education, compared to only 13% and 12% respectively of their Mexican and Puerto Rican counterparts. Hernandez and Rivera-Batiz (2003) also reported that Dominican students in New York City have high school retention rates that are substantially higher than for the overall Latino population.

EXPLAINING EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

One of the most common indicators used to illustrate the struggles faced by Latinos in educational institutions is the dropout rate. For example, the status dropout rate (the percentage of an age group that is not enrolled in school and has not earned a high school credential) for Latinos 16–24 years old in 2001 was 27%, or about four times larger than the status dropout rate of similar Whites, which stood at 7.3% (NCES, 2003). More disturbing, in retrospect, comparisons of dropout rates over time also illustrate that the educational gap between Latinos and other ethnic and racial groups has not closed very much in more than two decades. Between 1972 and 2001, the status dropout rates for White and Black young adults declined significantly (41% and 49%, respectively) while the decline in the Latino rate was more modest (21%).

Some, but not all, of the high Latino dropout rates can be explained by greater dropout rates among Latino immigrants, many of whom have never enrolled in U.S. schools. However, even among Latino young adults born in the United States, the status dropout rate in 2001 was 15.4%, slightly more than twice the rate for White students and about 40% higher than the status dropout rate for Black students (NCES, 2003).

In reviewing the literature on school-leaving among Latinos, Vélez and Saenz (2001) suggested that the best approach to understanding the dropout activity of these students is the ecological model, which makes linkages between individuals, the groups in which they participate, and the environment in which they live. They identified three clusters—individual, family, and structural—useful in organizing or making sense of the growing research findings around high school attrition. Before beginning the discussion of the three clusters of factors affecting Latino

dropout rates, it is important to point out that many of the empirical observations based on Latino youth are consistent with results based on their peers from other racial and ethnic groups.

Individual Factors Explaining the Educational Attainment of Latinos[1]

Alienation from educational goals and school officials and/or peer pressure (see Valenzuela, 1999) leads some students to engage in what has been called "confrontational practices" or behaviors that oppose or violate specific rules of school. Velez (1989) concluded that Puerto Rican and Chicano high school students who cut classes were more likely to drop out of school. Disruptive behaviors frequently lead to school sanctions such as suspensions, which have been found to be associated with leaving high school before graduation (Velez, 1989). Ironically, schools are frequently slow to catch on to oppositional behaviors such as cutting classes, suggesting that the staff is either indifferent or uncaring (see Flores-González, 2002).

Although oppositional behaviors often have negative consequences for students, there are instances when students act out of a critical interpretation of schools as an oppressive institution. In such cases, one can argue for the presence of what some scholars call "resistance" of a transformative form (Yosso, 2005), which involves conscious efforts to challenge and overcome practices and attitudes harmful to students of color.

Ogbu (1987) asserted that involuntary minorities are especially likely to develop an oppositional culture due to the rejection that they experience from mainstream society. Involuntary minorities consist of those groups whose initial incorporation into the United States occurred through military conquest, slavery, or other aggressive means. Involuntary minorities include Chicanos, Puerto Ricans, African Americans, and Native Americans. In contrast, voluntary minorities initially came to this country through their free will and, as a result, experience less conflictive relations with the mainstream society. Hence, members of these groups are more likely to embrace the cultural values of the host society because they are less likely to experience rejection from the mainstream society. For example, recent data on intermarriage rates suggesting that Chinese Americans have high out-marriage rates (mostly to Whites) was used by Bonilla-Silva (2006) to buttress his argument that some Asian American groups have achieved what he calls "honorary white" status.

Students with involuntary minority backgrounds develop identities in opposition to school culture when they believe in the existence of job ceilings that make the acquisition of educational credentials irrelevant for socioeconomic mobility. For them, hard work in school does not necessarily lead to economic success in the future because society has been structured so that class or ethnicity circumscribes one's opportunities (Fine, 1991). Among Latinos, Mexicans and Puerto Ricans are characterized as having experienced "castelike" conditions of socioeconomic incorporation, whereas Cubans experienced a warmer government reception and developed ethnic enclaves in Florida that gave them an edge in the local economy (Bohon, Johnson, & Gorman, 2006).

Another important argument made by oppositional theory is that involuntary minorities tend to experience difficulty in maintaining a racial/ethnic identity and academic success simultaneously because academic success is perceived by them as a characteristically "White" (or middle class) behavior (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). Success in school comes at the expense of their own culture (and the friendship of coethnic peers) as they embrace "White" culture (McLaren, 1994). However, in studying academic achievement among Latino students, some researchers have concluded that success in school does not necessarily come at the expense of ethnic identity (Antrop-Gonzalez, Velez, & Garrett, 2005; Flores-González, 2002). For example, a

study in a predominantly Latino high school in Chicago concluded that high achievers did not associate school success with "whiteness" and that although some were initially harassed by their peers, they went on to occupy their own social space in school and were not pressured to underachieve (Flores-González, 1999). In another study of Puerto Rican high achievers (Antrop-Gonzalez, Velez, & Garrett, 2005), the authors observed that "they were very clear about their Puerto Rican identity, always stating to their friends that they were 'Boricua' or 'puertorriqueño' and proud about it" (p. 86). So it appears that many successful Latino students engage in "accommodation without assimilation" (Gibson, 1988) by navigating between different cultural worlds, such as the home, community, and schools, while keeping the cultural framework acquired at home (and in their countries of origin for immigrant students).

Ogbu's (1987) model of voluntary/involuntary minorities can also be criticized for generalizing assumptions about specific ethnic groups and ignoring the internal variability frequently present in these groups. Olneck (2003) noted, for example, that sometimes immigrant students from voluntary minority backgrounds (e.g., some Asian groups) do better in school than their U.S.-born counterparts. This means that the often-cited advantages in school performance that members of voluntary minorities enjoy can disappear. He also suggested that resistance to schooling at times can be inspired by "cultural revitalization movements that redefine ethnic identities in ways conducive to educational achievement."

Academic Expectations and Performance

Student orientations toward the future and parental expectations for college are often cited in the literature as being related to school persistence. Students who plan to attend college tend to finish high school at higher rates than those who do not plan to go on to college (Velez, 1989). In their study of native-born children of immigrant parents, Portes and Rumbaut (2001) found that Mexican-origin students had the lowest levels of educational expectations of all the Latino subgroups, whereas Cuban students who attended bilingual private schools in Miami had the highest level of educational expectations

Bohon, Johnson, & Gorman (2006) found that Cuban adolescents have stronger college aspirations and expectations than non-Latino Whites, whereas Mexican and Puerto Rican youth have significantly weaker college aspirations and expectations than non-Latino White youth. Controlling for family socioeconomic status, test scores, and other demographic factors eliminates the Mexican disadvantage in college aspirations and expectations vis-à-vis Whites, whereas for Puerto Ricans, the addition of these variables eliminates differences from non-Latino Whites in college expectations, but not aspirations. Additionally, the stronger Cuban college aspirations and expectations remained after adjusting for socioeconomic status and other factors.

Planning for college has significant effects for the probability of completing college among Latinos. The authors of a recent study of Latino college attainment concluded that Latino students planning for some college (vs. none) increased the probability of completion by 48%, and those who planned for a bachelor's degree increased the probability by 53% (Swail et al., 2005).

Parents exert a strong and decisive influence on the formation of educational expectations among Latino students (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2001). Portes and Rumbaut (2001) found that about three out of every four parents of Cuban and Nicaraguan descent expected their children to graduate from college. Using logistic regression analysis, Swail et al. (2005) found that although Latino parental expectations for their children to attend some college or to get a bachelor's

degree (ves. none) was not related to finishing college, parental expectation of advanced degrees increased the probability of completing a 4-year degree by 46%.

Academic performance as measured by school grades appears to be negatively associated with the risk of dropping out among Latino students (Driscoll, 1999; Velez, 1989). Put simply, students with higher grades are less likely to become high school dropouts compared to those with poorer scholarly performance. Gatekeepers such as school counselors and teachers frequently use grades as the main criterion to grant entry to college-oriented classes and/or privileged academic programs with small class sizes and strong teacher-student relationships (Conchas, 2006). Good grades can be a boost to the academic self-concept of high-achieving Latino students and makes future learning easier or less costly than for their less successful counterparts.

Generational Status and Acculturation

Immigrant students face a broad array of educational needs and problems. In addition to the need for learning English, these children and youths face problems like high residential mobility, poverty, the emotional stress associated with adjusting to a new social and physical environment, and inadequate social support to compensate for broken community ties in their native countries and loss of support necessary for psychological well-being (Ream, 2005; Valdés, 2001). Previous studies have found consistently higher dropout rates for foreign-born Latino youths and students with limited English proficiency (see Velez, 1989; Warren, 1996).

However, some research has observed that recent immigrants actually do better in school than U.S.-born Latinos (Conchas, 2006; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 1995). Driscoll (1999), in her research distinguishing among first-, second-, and third-generation Latino youth when modeling dropout behavior, found no generational differences in the odds of dropping out of high school early (by the sophomore year). However, among students who made it through the first 2 years of high school, she found that both first- and second-generation students were less likely to become dropouts than third-generation students, net of class, school performance, aspirations, and family structure.

These contradictory results suggest that immigrant status is associated with a variety of factors and situations, some of which promote dropping out (e.g., lower family income and less educated parents) and others that encourage school retention and completion. For example, Conchas (2006) suggested that Latino immigrant students have a more positive view of the opportunity structure and are willing to work harder than their U.S.-born counterparts.

Portes and his colleagues (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Portes & Zhou, 1993) noted that the particular track that immigrants take depends on their access to resources within their families and communities. The road to educational success is dependent on a socially supportive environment that promotes selective acculturation and fluent bilingualism. An example of this would be the pre-1980 Cuban exile community in southern Florida, who constructed a solid and institutionally diversified ethnic economy that included a system of bilingual private schools (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). Under the segmented assimilation model proposed by Portes and his colleagues, attention is paid to the interaction among the economic and human capital of different groups, the context of exit from their countries of origin, and the context of reception (including racial stratification, spatial segregation, and government policies) in determining how immigrant groups adjust to life in the United States.

One important asset for immigrant youth in pursuing advanced levels of education is their legal status. Significant numbers of Mexicans, Salvadorans, and Guatemalans are undocumented youth and, as such, face legal and economic barriers to higher education (Abrego, 2006). Even if they graduate from high school with good academic records, undocumented students often fail to qualify for in-state tuition and federal and local financial aid for college.

Immigrants' Educational Selectivity

The selective migration argument is sometimes used to explain earnings and health disparities among immigrants' children (Borjas, 1987; Landale, Oropesa, & Gorman, 2000). By calculating the sending countries' average levels of educational attainment as well as the average educational attainment of immigrants for a particular cohort or time period, Feliciano (2005) tested the predictive power of the selective migration model to explain college attainment among the second generation of 32 national-origin groups. Her findings suggest that as educational selectivity among Mexican immigrants declined over time (1960–1990 period), there has been a similar decline in the percent college educated among immigrant children. Controlling for group educational selectivity (as well as parents' socioeconomic status) eliminates the lower college expectations among Latinos and cancels the advantage of belonging to an Asian ethnic group. These findings challenge cultural explanations that are used to account for ethnic group differences in educational success and suggest that class reproduction appears to be taking place from the generation of immigrants to their children.

Spanish Language Use

Spanish language use is commonly targeted as an extremely important factor to explain the educational failure of Latino youth. However, research on high school students suggests that speaking Spanish at home, per se, does not lead to lowered academic performance (Yeung, Marsh, & Suliman, 2000). In their study of second-generation children, Portes and Rumbaut (2001) reported a negative effect of losing the parental language on school achievement, measured as scores in standardized tests and grade point average.

Family-Related Factors

The family is often seen in the literature as responsible to a significant extent for the success or failure of students in the educational system (see Stanton-Salazar, 2001). Given that Latinos have often been viewed as a group characterized by high levels of familism, the family-related factors need to be considered when examining the educational outcomes of Latino students.

Family Structure The literature provides consistent evidence regarding the relationship between family structure and school completion. In particular, widespread research has concluded that students with two parents at home are more likely to continue their schooling than are those with only one parent at home (Velez, 1989). Although two-thirds of Latino families are married-couple families (Perez, 2001), high rates of female-headed households are prevalent in some Latino subgroups, in particular among Puerto Ricans (Acosta-Belén & Santiago, 2006).

A study comparing Latino subgroups suggests that the positive effects of having two parents (in decreasing dropout behavior) are greater for Puerto Rican and Cuban students than for Chicanos (Velez, 1989).

Family Socioeconomic Background The literature is also very clear on the impact of family socioeconomic status (SES) on the probability of school completion, with low SES being one of the most frequently mentioned causes of dropping out (Hauser, Simmons, & Pager, 2000). Economic constraints can force some students to drop out because they or their families need their earnings immediately (Romo & Falbo, 1996; Rumberger & Thomas, 2000).

The family's economic position can also have an impact on the neighborhood of residence, with consequences for the quality of life and the quality of the schools that Latino students attend. Living in a neighborhood characterized by concentrated poverty is associated with inadequate housing, high crime rates, high unemployment rates, and higher exposure to health hazards, all of which have direct or indirect effects on the educational chances of children (Sampson, Morenoff, & Gannon-Rowley, 2002).

The geographic concentration of poor minorities as a factor in educational outcomes of minority youth is especially important in the case of Latinos. Recent research by the Harvard Civil Rights Project has shown increasing levels of school segregation among minorities, particularly in the case of Latinos (Orfield & Lee, 2006). The average Latino student attends a school that is 28% White, whereas the average White student attends a school that is 78 % White.

The effects of housing and school segregation during early childhood have long-term educational consequences for Latino students. Comparing Latinos who grew up in segregated neighborhoods to those growing up in predominantly majority settings, Massey and Fischer (2006) found that the latter group completed more advanced placement courses in high school. They also concluded that Black and Latino students growing up in integrated surroundings earned higher grades during their first three terms of college than their counterparts who came of age in segregated settings.

As a result of an unstable economic situation, many Latino families tend to move frequently within the United States. Ream (2005) argued that student mobility limits the acquisition of social capital because it prevents close-knit and trusting peer interactions. This makes it more difficult for students to feel "connected" to their schools and teachers. Thus, changing schools because of family moves is often found to increase a student's probability of dropping out (Velez, 1989) and is also associated with lower test scores in 12th grade among Mexican-origin youth (Ream, 2005). Family socioeconomic background also impacts postsecondary educational outcomes among Latinos. Swail et al. (2005) concluded that middle-income Latinos had a 17 % higher probability of earning a BA compared to low-income Latinos.

Social Capital Discussions related to the effect of SES on educational outcomes often involve paying attention to cultural capital, frequently characterized as a cluster of dispositions and "tastes" (Bourdieu, 1977). The cultural knowledge of the upper and middle classes are highly valued, so those who are not born into these families must access this knowledge through formal schooling. Assuming a critical race theory perspective, Yosso (2005) criticized the cultural capital paradigm for assuming a deficit view of communities of color and proposed an alternative concept called "community cultural wealth" (see below).

The family also impacts the social capital available to the student (i.e., the degree and quality of middle-class forms of social support present in a young person's interpersonal network) (see Coleman, 1988). This is usually conceptualized to affect students from two perspectives. In the first, high

levels of parental social capital are associated with the ability of adults to control the student's behavior by way of shared norms and expectations that can readily be enforced. Teachman, Paasch, and Carver (1997) called this process "connectivity." They found that parents who interact with their children and their children's schools have children who are more likely to remain in school. The second conceptualization of social capital focuses on the presence or lack of opportunities for generalized exchange between adults and youths. To succeed in school, students must acquire a set of skills known as "funds of knowledge." These funds of knowledge allow the student to decode the school's institutional culture. By knowing and displaying institutionally sanctioned discourses and by their ability to solve school-related problems, students are identified as insiders; that is, they receive the school's approval or sponsorship (Stanton-Salazar, 2001).

An overemphasis on middle-class forms of social and cultural capital assumes that students come to school without the normative cultural knowledge and skills and that their parents neither value nor support their child's education. Basing her theoretical constructs on research findings on Latinos and other communities of color, Yosso (2005) argued for the presence of "community cultural wealth" useful as survival strategies under oppressive conditions by conceptualizing six forms of capital: (a) aspirational capital—ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, allowing children to "dream of possibilities beyond their present circumstances" (p. 78); (b) linguistic capital—language and communication styles attained in more than one language; (c) familial capital—cultural knowledge nurtured and transmitted through kinship ties, where one learns "the importance of maintaining a health connection to our community and its resources" (p. 79); (d) social capital—networks of people and community resources that provide both instrumental and emotional support to navigate through society's institutions; (e) navigational capital—the ability or skills to maneuver through social institutions like schools that create stressful and hostile situations that place students "at-risk" of failing; and (f) resistant capital—"those knowledges and skills fostered through oppositional behavior that challenges inequality" (p. 80) and that have the potential to transform oppressive structures of domination.

STRUCTURAL-LEVEL FACTORS

The literature on Latino dropouts, as is the case with the general dropout literature, focuses primarily on individual- and family-level factors in efforts to develop an understanding of the forces explaining students' dropout behavior (Velez & Saenz, 2001). Implicitly, this analytical approach emphasizes deficiencies of students and their families in accounting for the failure of students in the educational system. As such, schools and communities are let off the hook when it comes to explaining why certain students do not succeed in the educational system (Hispanic Dropout Project, 1998).

School Practices

In their quest for maintaining order and for pursuing educational excellence, educational systems develop a variety of school practices and policies. For example, tracking or curricular placement is one institutional practice that has immediate and long-term effects for high school students, affecting not only their chances of finishing school but also their chances of attending college and attaining a college degree (Kao & Thompson, 2003; Velez, 1985, 1989). Students enrolled in the college preparatory track are exposed to more rigorous material, receive more

attention from teachers and school staff, and complete more advanced placement classes than those who are enrolled in other curricular tracks (Oakes, 1985). However, Latinos are less likely to take the courses associated with school retention and college preparation, as evidenced by their low completion of advanced science and mathematics courses in high school (Kao & Thompson, 2003; Swail et al., 2005). Taking pre-calculus and calculus has been found to be significantly associated with the probability of completing a 4r-year degree among Latinos (Swail et al., 2005).

The practice of grade retention or holding back students because of language difficulties, learning disorders, poor attendance, or academic failure has also been found to have negative effects on high school graduation (Farkas, 2003). Students who have been delayed in their schooling as a result of grade retention tend to experience higher rates of withdrawal from school (Jerald, 2006). Latino students have very high incidences of grade retention (National Association of School Psychologists, 2003).

Community Economic and Demographic Context

A study of Latino college students in a Midwestern university concluded that those residing in a predominately Latino neighborhood were less likely to persist in college (Velez, 2002). This finding, if generalizable to students in the rest of the nation, augurs lower completion rates for Latino college students, given increasing rates of residential segregation in the nation's largest metropolitan areas between Whites and Latinos (Velez & Martin, 2003).

PUBLIC POLICY IMPLICATIONS

In terms of its impact on access to education, federal action on immigration reform is one of the most important issues of the 21st century. A streamlined path to legal residency and citizenship would enhance the social, economic, and political assimilation of the millions of undocumented Latinos living in the United States, allowing them and their children to secure rights to an advanced education, including financial aid. In the meantime, some states (e.g., California) have taken the lead in providing some remedy for the legal vulnerability of undocumented youth by passing legislation that qualifies many of them for a waiver of out-of-state tuition (Abrego, 2006). However, these measures do not go far enough, which is why it is very important that the U.S. Congress pass the Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors Act, which would grant many youth access to legal residency and federal financial aid.

It is also very important to encourage Latino students to prepare for college as early as possible. Thus, federal programs like GEAR UP and Upward Bound should continue to be funded, as they help low-income students, starting in middle school, to learn more about post secondary education and the curricular choices they have to make to achieve their occupational plans. However, there are also excellent nonfederal programs that have proven successful in engaging Latino students early, such as AVID in San Diego, El Puente in New York City, and Aspira of America, that can be replicated in other places.

At the curricular level, state and local school leaders should develop policies to encourage the selection of Algebra I at the eighth grade in order to open up further academic options for students in high school (Swail et al., 2005). It is also crucial that public schools provide remedial English programs for Latino students and well-run bilingual programs for English learners.

At the college level, it is imperative to develop financial aid policies that provide sufficient support and enable Latino students to maintain continuous enrollment while bringing about engagement with faculty and staff. Student success needs to be enhanced through collaborative action by faculty and staff who adopt the persistence and graduation of their students of color as their "mission" and who treat their students as members of a family (AASCU, 2005). Access to residence halls that provide coordinated student services and opportunities for undergraduate Latino students to work closely with faculty members on research projects are other campus policies that have been used in many college campuses to promote student success among Latinos (AASCU, 2005).

DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

After surveying the methodological and sampling shortcomings of previous federally funded educational surveys, Velez and Saenz (2001) called for a large-scale nationally representative longitudinal survey that would focus on the educational outcomes of Latino students. Such a study would collect data from students, teachers, administrators, peers, and parents. It also would provide information about the neighborhoods and communities where students live and precise information about the nativity and immigration status of students to determine the length of stay of students and their parents in the United States. Such a longitudinal study needs to include an adequate sample of undocumented Latino/a youths, a sizable and growing population that is facing exclusionary immigration policies and legal barriers that block their access to educational mobility.

The passage of what can be considered anti-immigrant legislation in a number of states requires the continued and future attention of researchers. For example, implementation of Proposition 227 in California made enrollment in bilingual programs problematic for many Latino students. It also failed to deliver on its promise that limited-English-proficient students would become proficient in English within 1 year (Crawford, 2003). Additional studies that document the impact of Proposition 227 and similar measures in other states and that assess the efficacy of bilingual programs (e.g., see Greene, 1998) to enhance academic subject mastery and English acquisition are needed.

Similarly, the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) and its mandatory testing of all children, even those who are English learners, poses a real threat to the self-esteem and academic progress of many Latino students. These tests have to be administered in English with only minor special accommodations for some of the limited-English-proficient children, even though research shows that it takes between 5 and 7 years to gain mastery of academic English. Under this new "audit" culture, public schools (but not private) are subjected to strong accountability measures, teachers are forced to "teach to the test," and a student's worth is reduced to her or his test scores (Apple, 2006). Evidence on the effects of graduation tests in Texas show rising grade retention and high school dropout rates for Latino students (Valenzuela, 2005). New studies are need to determine the adequacy and impact of NCLB as applied to immigrant Latino students in our nation's school systems.

Finally, the school reform trends of the early 21st century include efforts to impose a "market logic" on public schools where students and their parents can behave as consumers presented with a wide array of services (Apple, 2006). This has resulted in the development of school vouchers, tax credits, and publicly funded "choice" schools in a number of states. More research is needed to ascertain the impact of these school reforms on Latino students.

NOTE

1. This section is partially drawn from themes found in an article authored by William Velez and Rogelio Saenz (2001) titled "Toward a Comprehensive Model of the School Leaving Process Among Latinos." *School Psychology Quarterly*, *16*(4), 445–467.

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