The violation of Mexican American students’ educational rights: A Midwestern ethnography

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I. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to discuss discontinuities that Mexican American students encountered in their attempts to participate in high school instruction. This paper draws on findings from my ethnographic study that identified literacy practices across home-school community settings for Mexican American high school students.¹ This paper seeks to mediate between educators who are obligated to recognize and adhere to legal precedents established for education in a democratic society, and legal professionals who are obligated to inform themselves through evidence from the field on how legal precedents are being implemented in the public school system. It is hoped that a balance between the two professional communities, law and education, can affect an optimum outcome for traditionally marginalized students. The findings should be of importance to researchers, educators, and policymakers interested in school reform and in improving educational practices for high school students from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

II. LEGAL DECISIONS AFFECTING MEXICAN AMERICANS

The Supreme Court decision Brown v. Board of Education² established that segregated instruction for African Americans was unequal to that of Whites.³ Brown’s “separate but equal” ruling was used in support of about 1,800 Chinese-speaking students in San Francisco who contested monolingual

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¹ Heriberto Godina is an assistant professor in the Division of Curriculum & Instruction, College of Education, University of Iowa. I wish to thank Jeannine Harms for her thoughtful reviews of earlier drafts of this article. I also wish to thank Dr. Georgia Earnest Garcia at the University of Illinois at Urbana for her encouragement and critical guidance during my earlier investigation of this topic. Dedicated to Alicia García, may you forever walk in victory.


³ Id. at 494.
English instruction in the public schools. The subsequent Supreme Court decision in Lau v. Nichols determined that students who do not understand the language of instruction in public schools are denied equal educational opportunity. These two decisions were instrumental in the formalization of Bilingual Education and English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction in the United States. Bilingual Education teachers are required to validate students’ cultural backgrounds, but this requirement frequently falls short of a sophisticated interpretation.

Currently, legal initiatives in California and Texas are foreshadowing a decline in the educational advances for students of Mexican heritage. Challenges to bilingual education, affirmative action, and immigrants’ rights are coming from states that share the largest populations of Mexican Americans in the United States.

In California, three propositions have been approved by a popular vote. Proposition 187, passed in November 1994, limits immigrants’ rights to medical and educational services. Although Proposition 187 was approved by

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5. Id. at 569.
6. Bilingual Education refers to a program of instruction where two languages are used as the medium of instruction. English as a Second Language (ESL) refers to the teaching of English communication skills to persons whose native language is not English. In U.S. public schools, bilingual education is typically taught in elementary settings, and ESL is taught in secondary settings. In the United States, both programs primarily emphasize the student’s transition into English, as opposed to the maintenance of the student’s native language. See Colin Baker, Foundations of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism 172 (1996) (describing bilingual programs).
10. See San Miguel, Jr. & Valencia, supra note 8, at 390.
a racially divided vote,\textsuperscript{12} it has been ruled “illegal” by Judge Pfaelzer\textsuperscript{13} and is currently awaiting a possible hearing before the U.S. Supreme Court.

Second, Proposition 209, entitled the “Civil Rights Initiative,” basically eliminated affirmative action programs that benefitted minority students in the University of California system.\textsuperscript{14} It mandated that ethnic/racial minorities could not be given preferential treatment for admission, as well as for employment and the awarding of state work contracts.\textsuperscript{15} Proposition 209 is similar to \textit{Hopwood v. Texas},\textsuperscript{16} which also eliminated race and ethnicity as factors for university admission.\textsuperscript{17}

Third, Proposition 227, also known as “English for the Children,” recently challenged the existing bilingual education programs in California in preference for “structured immersion”\textsuperscript{18} in English.\textsuperscript{19} These recent legal initiatives have resulted in decreased university enrollment for both Mexican American and African American students.\textsuperscript{20} Minority enrollment in professional schools of law and medicine have experienced the sharpest decline.\textsuperscript{21}

Educational goals within mainstream school settings may fall short of instruction that validate cultural and linguistic background.\textsuperscript{22} In Illinois,\textsuperscript{23} students who are eligible for Bilingual/ESL services due to their limited-English status are taught through a transitional English program of

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{12} \textit{Id.}
  \item \textsuperscript{14} \textit{See San Miguel, Jr. & Valencia, supra note 8, at 391.}
  \item \textsuperscript{15} \textit{See id. See also Aaron Epstein, Affirmative Action Ban Stands, AUSTIN AMERICAN-STATESMAN, Nov. 4, 1997, at A1 (discussing preferential treatment affecting minorities).}
  \item \textsuperscript{16} \textit{78 F.3d 932 (5th Cir. 1996).}
  \item \textsuperscript{17} \textit{Id.}
  \item \textsuperscript{18} \textit{Structured immersion is defined as a “sink-or-swim” instructional practice. Language-minority students are taught in the primary language of instruction. In the United States, structured immersion replaces the student’s primary language with English. See also \textit{Baker}, supra note 6, at 174 (comparing structured immersion with other bilingual education models).}
  \item \textsuperscript{19} \textit{See San Miguel, Jr. & Valencia, supra note 8, at 391.}
  \item \textsuperscript{20} \textit{Id. at 392-93.}
  \item \textsuperscript{21} \textit{Id. at 393.}
  \item \textsuperscript{22} \textit{See generally KATHRYN H. AU, LITERACY INSTRUCTION IN MULTICULTURAL SETTINGS (1993) (describing mainstream/minority differences in education).}
  \item \textsuperscript{23} \textit{The particular focus on Illinois law is due to ethnographic data being collected in rural Illinois.}
\end{itemize}
instruction. 24 Barclays Official Illinois Administrative Rules 25 defines ESL instruction as specialized instruction designed to assist students whose home language is other than English in attaining English proficiency. 26 ESL instruction includes development of listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. 27 Illinois requires that ESL be taught by a certified teacher who is "endorsed for teaching ESL" or has a "Statement of Approval for teachers of ESL, issued by the State Board of Education. 28"

Although most of the students and families of Mexican background shared the belief that learning English is important for effective participation in an English-speaking society, they did not understand the optimum method for learning English. 29 Parents of Mexican background readily deferred to the authority of the school for meeting the instructional needs of their children. 30 However, the lack of communication between the Mexicano parents and school personnel contributed to their children's marginalization. 31

III. PERSPECTIVES

Other researchers have reported variations in the literacy practices of groups frequently marginalized by schools in the United States. 32 Moll and González noted the "funds of knowledge" 33 that Mexican American house-


25. BARCLAYS OFFICIAL ILLINOIS ADMINISTRATIVE RULES (1994).

26. Id. at 291.


28. See BARCLAYS, supra note 25, at 291.

29. See Godina, supra note 1, at 141; Interview with Mr. Graves, in Willow Grove (Mar. 17, 1996). When this interview took place at a public restaurant, Mr. Graves was a retired senior citizen who had lived in Willow Grove for most of his life.

30. See Godina, supra note 1, at 225.

31. Id.


33. Funds of knowledge represent the intellectual resources unique to a particular community. The knowledge base represented through a fund of knowledge has implications for understanding wider social networks and has implications for informing teachers on designing culturally-relevant
holds possess and that could be tapped by elementary teachers in their classroom instruction.\textsuperscript{34} Heath identified communicative differences in early literacy practices among African American and White (non-Hispanic) households, which adversely affected African American students' participation.\textsuperscript{35} However, few researchers from within the educational anthropology tradition have looked at secondary-age students, specifically, Mexican American high school students.\textsuperscript{36} In addressing this population, it is important to acknowledge these students' desires to cross cultural boundaries as American high school students, as well as to recognize their ESL, migrant, minority status.

IV. ETHNOGRAPHIC METHODS IN MY STUDY\textsuperscript{37}

The following section describes how I specifically conducted an ethnographic research study in rural Illinois. Pseudonyms are used to describe all participants and locales in order to protect the confidentiality of the study.

Primary data collection took place in a rural, agricultural community in the midwestern United States, named here as "Willow Grove." Mexican American families, attracted by migrant employment, have settled in the Willow Grove community for over thirty years. Willow Grove High School serves approximately 350 students in this region. Approximately fifteen percent of the student body is Mexican American. The formal data collection began in January 1996 and continued through June 1996. Informal forays into the field allowed me to identify key contacts prior to the study and to double-check findings identified in the initial examination of data.\textsuperscript{38}

Initially, twenty-five students—all of the Mexican American students enrolled in the tenth and eleventh grades—were included in the study. Then a


34. For a discussion of the funds of knowledge approach to education, see Moll & González, supra note 32, at 440. See also Carlos G. Vélez-Ibáñez, Networks of Exchange Among Mexicans in the U.S. and Mexico: Local Level Mediating Responses to National and International Transformations, 17 URB. ANTHROPOLOGY 27 (1988).

35. See generally Heath, supra note 32.


37. See Godina, supra note 1, at 40.

38. I also had initiated contact with the community as a teacher for the Summer Migrant Program for two summers prior to the study, and continued to work as a teacher after the study.
smaller group of ten students at the tenth grade level was identified for a more in-depth examination of literacy practices across home, community, and school settings. Secondary participants included the students’ parents and family, the school principal, teachers, and key community leaders.

Four types of documentation informed the study: interviews;\textsuperscript{39} observation across the three settings;\textsuperscript{40} collection of literacy artifacts;\textsuperscript{41} and the use of key informants.\textsuperscript{42} All interview data was tape-recorded, transcribed, and analyzed. Observation data was documented through field notes and entailed visiting classrooms, students’ homes, and attending community activities, such as soccer games and \textit{ferias} (local fairs).

Data analysis was ongoing throughout the data collection procedures in an iterative process that triangulated initial findings from across the different types of data.\textsuperscript{43} Throughout the preliminary and final data analysis the “constant-comparative method” was used whereby four stages were followed for analysis: incidents were compared to each category, categories and their properties were integrated, theory and categories were delimited, and then appropriate theories were written for the study.\textsuperscript{44}

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39. Each focal student participated in four, 45-minute, semi-structured, open-ended interviews, resulting in a total of about 30 hours of interview data. Secondary participants were interviewed with less frequency than the primary participants. A total of 20 hours of interview data was collected from the secondary participants. The initial formal interviews were more structured than the latter interviews and followed a protocol of questions, while subsequent interviews were more open-ended. For example, the focal students’ initial interview elicited general background and literacy information. The focal students’ second interview session focused on classroom literacy practices. During the third interview session I focused on literacy artifacts found during a locker inventory that catalogued the textbooks and other literacy items they used for school. The focal students’ fourth interview focused on their individual literacy perceptions and practices.

40. The three settings for this study were the students’ home, Willow Grove High School, and the Willow Grove community.

41. I collected artifacts that were examples of the literacy practices under study, such as writing samples, student journal entries, and notes. Some of the classroom data were documented through photographs to capture key evidence.

42. “Informants” within ethnographic studies are people whom the researcher may find helpful for analyzing collected data because of their “insider” knowledge of the community. Informants can also be helpful for guiding research procedures because they may be able to recognize obstacles and provide insights for collecting data.

43. “Triangulation” of qualitative data involves the examination of multiple corroborating and contradicting data (such as interviews, observations, artifacts) in order to reduce the uncertainty of a particular interpretation. See YVONNA S. LINCOLN & EGON G. GUBA, NATURALISTIC INQUIRY 305 (1985), for a discussion of triangulation in qualitative research.

V. CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

The findings of my study indicated that students demonstrated different literacy practices (and accomplishments) in their homes and community than those acknowledged at school. Although the students were bilingual in Spanish and English (albeit at varied levels of proficiency), the school only viewed them in terms of their limited English status. For example, many of the students had parents who were monolingual Spanish speakers; and as a result, the parents relied heavily on the students to translate school reports, medical forms, tax forms, bank statements, and other items. Although some of the students were enrolled in a course entitled “Practical English,” their instructional opportunities for learning English ignored their “real life” responsibilities.

Sometimes, the school’s attempts to deal with the students’ ESL and Spanish-speaking status were well-intentioned but misguided. Instead of hiring teachers with bilingual or ESL training, or providing relevant in-service training, the school hired Spanish-speaking bilingual aides, without any educational training, to translate homework questions and tests for the students. With this type of help, students were expected to read and complete the same types of texts and tasks in English as the other students in the tenth grade. The Mexican American students felt neglected, did not respond to the aide’s attempts to keep them on task, and generally were disruptive. The passive way in which the Mexican American students were supposed to learn the curricu-

45. See Godina, supra note 1, at 214.

46. Id.

47. Ms. Rowell was the teacher assigned to teach Practical English I, II, and III at Willow Grove High School. During an interview, Ms. Rowell explained that Practical English was a slower-paced version of the other English course:

It’s a lower level form of where the English classes, the regular English classes, are at. What we do is we just take things a little bit slower. We explain things a little more in-depth. And, we just go over things a little bit more and kind of at a slower pace so that everyone can catch up. I don’t give them homework. We do it in the class, and we get it done that way.

Interview with Ms. Rowell, Teacher, Willow Grove High School, in Willow Grove (Feb. 28, 1996).

48. For example, one of the English teachers felt that she should not use Spanish language materials because she was specifically hired to teach English. So, instead of providing her students with the Spanish translation of John Steinbeck’s The Pearl to read along with the English version, or to double-check parts they did not understand, she relied on the bilingual aide to interpret and translate the text for the students in a room apart from the rest of the class. Interview with Ms. Rowell, Teacher, Willow Grove High School, in Willow Grove (Feb. 28, 1996).
lum was compounded by there being no Spanish-English reference materials available to help the students.

There were other times when opportunities to promote the students’ literacy accomplishments in the two languages were lost. The school had an excellent Spanish language program in which many of the Mexican American students were enrolled along with White students who were taking the class for college preparation purposes. During study hall, many of the White students asked the Mexican American students to help them with their Spanish homework. However, partially due to the segregated nature of the course enrollments—with the exception of the Spanish class—none of the Mexican American students asked the White students for help. Some of the Mexican American students did improve their English while at school. For example, one Mexican American female student felt she was learning to write in English through her extensive note-passing with her friends. However, the school curriculum and teachers’ knowledge of the students did not allow students’ informal writing activities to be incorporated into the curriculum or even acknowledged.

In the home setting, the role of literacy entailed translation associated with the practical aspects of maintaining a household, raising a family, and being gainfully employed. The role of literacy was different for families of Mexican background, as opposed to the role of literacy for monolingual, English-speaking White families. Parents mostly remained distant from the school setting. Many of the Mexican American males defined the world of literacy through its relationship with labor demands, which were the initial impetus for immigration. Parents of Mexican background were engaged in different literacy activities than their children and were constrained by their obligations to work within the fields and factories of Willow Grove. Parents’ labor roles

49. These materials include Spanish-English dictionaries, encyclopedias, or ESL textbooks.

50. Interview with Amanda Meza, Student, Willow Grove High School, in Willow Grove (Mar. 18, 1996).

51. Godina, supra note 1, at 126.

52. Id.

53. Id. (finding the most obvious difference being the English-Spanish translation that occurs within Mexican homes, and the clash of culture between Whites and Mexican-background families).

54. Id.

55. For example, the parents were less proficient at English than their children. Parents needed their children’s knowledge of English to help them translate functional literacy items, such as business correspondence.
precluded their opportunity and ability to establish an independent command of English.\footnote{56} 

Parents in Willow Grove firmly believed and acknowledged that school held the key for their children for socio-economic mobility, yet parents had a limited background for understanding and advising their children about school related matters.\footnote{57} In many ways, the students and their siblings acted independent of their parents in school related matters.\footnote{58} For example, one parent told her son, “\textit{Tu hazle como puedas}” (You do it however you can) when he told her of problems at school.\footnote{59} In terms of the students’ literacy development, this meant that students of Mexican descent were basically on their own when dealing with the school’s expectations on English assignments.\footnote{60} Parents’ language barriers also resulted in miscommunication.\footnote{61} For some of the Mexican American males, miscommunication was strategically used to keep parents misinformed about discipline problems and low grades.\footnote{62} Ironically, even the school relied on the ability of parents and students to be able to translate their own documents from English to Spanish.\footnote{63}

\footnote{56} Parents worked all day while their children mostly attended school, hopefully learning some English. At the end of the day, parents were usually too tired to attend night school to learn English. \textit{See also} Godina, \textit{supra} note 1.

\footnote{57} \textit{See} Godina, \textit{supra} note 1, at 225. \textit{See also} GUADALUPE VALDÉS, CON RESPETO, BRIDGING THE DISTANCES BETWEEN CULTURALLY DIVERSE FAMILIES AND SCHOOLS: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC PORTRAIT (1996) (finding that Mexican parents usually deferred total responsibility for school education to their children’s teachers).

\footnote{58} \textit{See} Godina, \textit{supra} note 1, at 190.

\footnote{59} Interview with Señora Gomez, in Willow Grove (Apr. 17, 1996).

\footnote{60} Farr and Delgado-Gaitan encountered similar evidence that revealed parents of Mexican background shared a limited knowledge for helping their children with school work. \textit{See also} Marcia Farr, \textit{En Los Dos Idiomas: Literacy Practices Among Chicago Mexicanos, in LITERACY ACROSS COMMUNITIES} 9 (Beverly J. Moss ed., 1994); Concha Delgado-Gaitan, \textit{School Matters in the Mexican American Home: Socializing Children to Education}, 29 AM. EDUC. RES. 1. 495 (1992) (for an examination of dissonant homework practices among Mexican background families).

\footnote{61} \textit{See} Godina, \textit{supra} note 1, at 156.

\footnote{62} A grandmother of a Willow Grove student described her family’s experience with this miscommunication: I don’t receive the letters from school. They take them, the boys, they see them, and they take them. Then I tell them to show the letters to their mother, to tell her what the letter says, but I imagine they know what it says. I did not care much until one day I asked their mother, “Did they give you the letter from school?” She said, “No.” Later, we found one [letter] torn up in the trash. They were doing bad in school.

Interview with Señora Ramirez, in Willow Grove (May 7, 1996) (translated from the original Spanish).

\footnote{63} Godina, \textit{supra} note 1, at 156.
Reading for entertainment was another key role for the literacy of the students and their families.\textsuperscript{64} Culturally and linguistically-relevant reading texts were acquired through outside sources, such as the delivery service provided by the River City Mercado.\textsuperscript{65} The novel\textsuperscript{a} and Spanish-language magazine texts were common features in many of the Mexican American homes; they were read for entertainment by many of the focal students, but were basically unnoticed in the school setting.\textsuperscript{67}

The Mexican norm for teacher respect\textsuperscript{68} allowed the school system to continue problematic practices without fear of criticism or sanction from the parents. In the Mexican American households of Willow Grove, the language barriers and deference to authority curtailed parents’ involvement in educational activities and was consistent with prior findings. However, school personnel’s lack of professional expertise in the area of second-language instruction aggravated the situation.\textsuperscript{69} School personnel were also complicit in estranging parents of Mexican background from the school setting by not providing effective outreach and more Spanish-language communication.\textsuperscript{70} School personnel needed to be more cognizant of the value of students as active participants in the education process. All too often the students were silenced in a process that devalued their culture and delegitimized their unique perspectives on life, labor, and language.\textsuperscript{71} In a democratic society, school personnel have a responsibility to provide appropriate instruction for all students, not just mainstream Whites.

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{64} \textit{Id.}
  \item \textsuperscript{65} \textit{Id.}
  \item \textsuperscript{66} For Mexicans, a “novela” can be defined as interpersonal drama illustrated through a television soap opera or a pulp-fiction type magazine.
  \item \textsuperscript{67} See Godina, \textit{supra} note 1, at 120. See also Paulo Freire, \textit{Pedagogy of the Oppressed} (1990) (discussing how Freire previously observed among indigenous populations within a colonial social framework how literacy and education were directly implicated in the socio-economic system that subordinated Mexican Americans).
  \item \textsuperscript{68} See Valdés, \textit{supra} note 57 (noting how the theme of \textit{respeto} [respect] among immigrants of Mexican background is a powerful tool for parents to inculcate a positive cultural belief system in their children).
  \item \textsuperscript{69} See Godina, \textit{supra} note 1, at 191.
  \item \textsuperscript{70} \textit{Id.}
\end{itemize}
VI. MYTHS OF INSTRUCTION

The following myths contributed to school personnel’s beliefs on how to educate Mexican American students. The myths they shared were rooted in historical tradition that ignored opportunities to improve literacy instruction.

A. Myth one: Spanish-language materials would prevent students from learning English.

Mexican-background students were not allowed to use reference materials in their native language that would have allowed them an independent strategy for dealing with language. The lack of reference materials limited students’ attempts to learn English by not providing them with Spanish/English dictionaries, as well as reading materials in Spanish. This was a lost opportunity that could have aided English instruction. Other researchers have encountered the dearth of Spanish-language literacy materials available to Latino students in public schools.62 Despite school personnel’s good intentions of providing instruction in English, in many cases, students did not have a sufficient scaffolding of English instruction to allow meaningful participation.73

B. Myths two and three: Appropriate ESL instruction could be provided by Spanish-language translators, and English learning would best occur in English class.

The bilingual aides hired to work with the Mexicano students were inexperienced aides with a limited knowledge of ESL. The aides had some successful translation strategies for students, but their efforts were inconsistent across the school setting.74

The concurrent translation approach was problematic for various reasons. The Mexicano students’ preference for the Spanish version of translated classroom activities75 was consistent with ESL research that indicated second-


73. See Godina, supra note 1, at 73.

74. Id.

75. Id.
language learners focused on instruction imparted in their native language. Students ignore the teacher when their primary language is not used during concurrent translation. When concurrent translation is used, teachers and students tend to emphasize English-language interaction and de-emphasize Spanish. Generally, the "most complex academic instruction was conducted in English."  

C. Myths four and five: School personnel who enforced the fictitious "handbook" rule for not speaking Spanish in places other than Spanish class would be helping students learn English, and students would have extra time to catch up with their studies in an extra study hall.

Myths four and five are combined because language learning could have been more effectively accommodated during study hall. Mexican-background students were enrolled in an extra study hall because it was believed that they needed extra time to catch up with their work. However, White students who enrolled in Spanish informally relied on Mexican-background students' Spanish fluency to advance their understanding of Spanish. The informal policy that did not permit students to speak Spanish in school is a practice that has deep historical roots. Such a restriction weakened the learning of Spanish as an academic subject because Spanish had a negative perception outside of the Spanish as a Foreign Language classroom. Mexican-background students were never identified by teachers as being able to tutor other students willing to learn Spanish. The extra study hall sessions could have provided a reciprocal structure for Mexican-background students to learn English, as well as for White students to learn Spanish. Instead, the speaking of Spanish outside of Spanish class remained a prohibited activity.

The Spanish class reinforced the students' native language, but ignored the linguistic sophistication of the native Spanish speakers. Spanish as a foreign

76. Crawford, supra note 7.

77. Lily Wong-Fillmore et al., Learning Language Through Bilingual Instruction: Final Report (1983, research report submitted to the National Institute of Education; University of California; Berkeley, California).


79. Legarreta, supra note 78.


81. See Godina, supra note 1, at 72.
language instruction disproportionately benefitted the White students who anticipated entrance to a university setting and needed to complete a foreign language requirement for admission. See generally Margarita Hidalgo, The Teaching of Spanish to Bilingual Spanish Speakers: A “Problem” of Inequality, in LANGUAGE AND CULTURE IN LEARNING: TEACHING SPANISH TO NATIVE SPEAKERS OF SPANISH 82 (Barbara J. Merino et al. eds., 1993); Barry McLaughlin, 2 SECOND-LANGUAGE ACQUISITION IN CHILDHOOD: SCHOOL-AGE CHILDREN (1984).

Cooperative activities in relation to literacy have been found to be beneficial for students of Mexican background, but the Mexican-background students who informally tutored Spanish to Whites did not receive similar informal instruction in English. In the study-hall setting where tutoring sessions frequently occurred, cooperative language learning would have been most effective, but students were self-segregated into different social groups. The negative status of Spanish and the extra study-hall remained a lost opportunity for more effective literacy learning for both White and Mexican-background students.

D. Myth six: Students who were fluent in English would do well in school.

Most Mexican-background students were slotted into low-track classes and segregated settings. Some of them did well, but were not recognized or acknowledged. Many Mexican-background students were placed in low-track courses that ignored their real-life needs for effective literacy instruction. Tracking practices are an instrumental influence upon Mexican American students’ later decision to drop out of school.

White school personnel shared well-intentioned, but misguided, beliefs that were obstacles for students of Mexican background to effectively learn English and participate in educational spheres pursuant to upward social mobility. Mexican American students were informally measured by their ability to speak and communicate in English, but the Mexican American

82. See Godina, supra note 1, at 104.
83. Id.
85. Id.
86. Id. at 62; see also 1. J. Callejas, Identification and Assessment of Career and Occupational Guidance and Counseling Services Provided to Hispanic Students in Selected Public High-schools in the State of Illinois (1986) (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Illinois (Urbana-Champaign)) (on file with the University of Illinois) (noting that Mexican American students in the Midwest were tracked into classes that limited their opportunities for a meaningful education).
89. See Godina, supra note 1, at 210.
students who had already become English-proficient still encountered negative perceptions by teachers who doubted their commitment and their family’s commitment to attaining a positive educational experience. The students of Mexican background at Willow Grove High School enrolled in lower educational tracks that did not foreshadow upward social mobility through education. Learning English was not necessarily a gateway for success at school.

Tapping into culturally-relevant instruction would have greatly aided the teachers. The lack of a school newspaper, and the emphasis on a town newspaper that basically wrote stories for the students circumvented a more authentic orientation toward literacy by not allowing the students to write their own stories and describe their own interpretation of the world. Although nine of the ten focal students were bilingual in Spanish and English, albeit at varied levels of proficiency, the school only viewed Mexican-background students in terms of their limited-English status. This perception was especially true for the Mexicanos. Many of the students had parents who were monolingual Spanish speakers, who relied on their children to translate papers and documents important to daily living. The instructional opportunities for learning English ignored the “real life” responsibilities and potential of Mexican-background students.

The teachers also needed to be more conscious of teaching strategies for second-language students, such as being patient and allowing second-language students more time to answer a question. In many classroom observations, I saw the Mexican American students thinking seriously about the question and even come up with a correct response, but they were not acknowledged by the teacher asking the question because the teacher did not wait for them to answer. Teachers should have been conscious of these simple procedures for second-language learners.

90. Id.
91. Id.
92. Id.
93. This is defined as instruction that is appropriate for minority populations within a mainstream educational setting. See generally GLORIA LADSON-BILLINGS, THE DREAMKEEPERS: SUCCESSFUL TEACHERS OF AFRICAN AMERICAN CHILDREN (1994) (discussing culturally-relevant instruction and how to use it).
94. See Godina, supra note 1, at 71.
95. Id.
96. Id.
97. Id.
E. Myth seven: Computer technology would only facilitate learning for academically proficient students.

The limited resources available for Mexican-background students extended to computer technology that might have enhanced literacy instruction, as well as stimulated the students’ interests in school.98 The school integrated computer instruction with the more sophisticated components of English.99 This included the effective writing instruction by Mrs. Reynolds who expected her students to hand in assignments done with a computer.100 The opportunity to familiarize students with technology was lost because similar expectations for writing did not occur in other classrooms, nor for Mexican-background students.101 There are many ESL computer resources available for high school students,102 but the school did not take advantage of any of them because they did not view the Mexicano students as computer users.103 The lack of technology for limited-English students was another lost opportunity. Technology could have been a potentially effective learning tool that would deemphasize the role of oral English as the principle medium for instruction.

VII. CONCLUSION

Educational implications for the study include how “conventional wisdom” or common sense approaches for educating second-language students did not work.104 Educators need to become informed about ESL practices. Each teacher at Willow Grove High School was working in a vacuum.105 They

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98. See K. HAYCOCK & S. M. NAVARRO, UNFINISHED BUSINESS: FULFILLING OUR CHILDREN’S PROMISE 26 (1988) (noting successful applications of computer technology with Mexican American students); see also Maria B. Arias, Computer Access for Hispanic Secondary Students, in LANGUAGE MINORITY STUDENTS AND COMPUTERS 243 (Christian J. Faltis & Robert A. DeVillar eds., 1990) (reporting a survey of high schools in 12 California counties that determined Hispanic students had unequitable and limited access to computers in comparison to Whites).

100. Interview with Mrs. Reynolds, Teacher, Willow Grove High School, in Willow Grove (Mar. 27, 1996).


103. See Godina, supra note 1, at 234.

104. Id.

105. Id.
needed to communicate and coordinate instruction for second-language students so that instruction was comprehensible. 106

One of the most important things that all the participants could do to improve the effective advancement of literacy and learning across all settings for Mexican-background students is move toward cultivating a more positive view of linguistic and cultural diversity. The co-optation of minority populations within mainstream educational interests, such as evidenced by the non-reciprocal Spanish-language learning by Whites, remains a problematic aspect of instruction. 107 Mexican-background students need to be integrated within meaningful activities at the school setting and not participate in marginalized activities that remain at the periphery of what is validated in the school and community. 108 School personnel need to consider the implementation of alternative genres of literacy such as novelas and Spanish-language magazines that were prevalent in many of the Mexican homes. The influence of popular culture, specifically contemporary music and television, on the literacy and learning of students of Mexican background may have allowed school personnel to provide students with more high-interest reading material and instruction. The recognition of authentic literacy interests among Mexicano/Mexican American populations could inform school personnel’s instruction in other topics through a funds-of-knowledge approach. 109 The validation of cultural knowledge is critical; the demographic trends indicate that the population of Mexican-background students is not expected to diminish, but continue to grow. 110

In response to arguments that instruction should be English-only, maintaining and improving first-language skills may improve the students’ opportunities for later life. Consider Richard Rodriguez, a popular advocate for English-only instruction for Mexican-background students. 111 He derides bilingual education by highlighting personal examples of how he shifted into English in his home. Rodriguez documented this process in his book *Hunger of Memory*. 112 The language loss Rodriguez selectively underwent is similar to

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106. Id.


108. See Godina, supra note 1, at 152; see also FOLEY, supra note 36 (discussing home, school, and community marginalization of Mexican American students).

109. See Moll & González, supra note 32; see also Moll, supra note 33 (discussing funds of knowledge).


111. See RICHARD RODRIGUEZ, HUNGER OF MEMORY: THE EDUCATION OF RICHARD RODRIGUEZ (1982).

112. Id.
what continues to occur in Willow Grove.113 However, Rodriguez’s example, which has appeased political conservatives who align themselves with English-only instruction, is problematic because of the negative psychological consequences related to estrangement from parents,114 and second-language implications related to insufficient first-language development.115 The level of second-language literacy that the students achieve may be important in considering their education in a rural setting. Does the second-language literacy remain at a functional level? Or is there a possibility that second-language literacy can allow other avenues of higher education to open up, and in effect open other career opportunities besides those that await them in the fields, factories, and meatpacking plants?5

The segregated contexts of instruction at the school emulated the segregated class differences between Whites and Mexican-background families in Willow Grove.116 Willow Grove High School’s implementation of segregated contexts for instruction provided little opportunity for the Mexicanos students to interact with teachers or to use English in a conversational manner.117 However, the integration of Mexican-background students, as opposed to their segregation, is critical for their effective participation in literacy and learning in the school setting. Students should not be stigmatized for the cultural and linguistic differences they bring to school. The use of bilingual aides for ESL instruction needs to be considered carefully by school administrators. Even though school personnel met the letter of the law by providing limited-English students with bilingual aides, they failed to meet the spirit of the law by not ensuring that the students were acquiring English, and failed to understand that learning through Spanish was appropriate for the students.118 They also did not provide ESL instruction. State and federal educational agencies need to monitor the autonomy of rural school districts and how they implement ESL and bilingual education policies so that they are in accordance with state and federal mandates.

113. See Godina, supra note 1, at 164; RODRIGUEZ, supra note 111. See generally Lily Wong Fillmore, When Learning a Second-Language Means Losing the First, 6 EARLY CHILDHOOD RES. Q. 323 (1991) (explaining the educational problems associated with language loss).

114. See Fillmore, supra note 113, at 338 (noting decline in parent-child communication); id. at 343-44 (noting alienation and violence).


116. See Godina, supra note 1, at 152.

117. Id.

118. Id.
Research implications include investigating how many of the Mexican-background students were originally from the same town in Mexico. Investigating the point of origin for the community of immigrants has implications for understanding the cultural beliefs and practices unique to a particular region in Mexico, such as a comparison of gendered literacy practices between Mexico and the United States. The aspect of gender differences becomes of special concern when Foley’s research foreshadows the negative educational outcomes for Mexican American females who encountered the least amount of upward social mobility as a result of their subordinated status. Additional research should explore gender, literacy, and education practices in the home origins of Mexican immigrant communities as a way of understanding their evolution in the United States.

An investigation in Mexico could also delineate cultural differences associated with school failure and success. An examination of these differences needs to more fully account for the colonial influences of Spain, France, and the United States, as well as for the system of internalized-colonization Mexicanos and Mexican Americans impose upon themselves. For persons of Mexican descent to internalize, or accept, a dominant/subordinate structure as “normal” creates an internalized system of failure that results in low self-esteem and lack of motivation to transcend the traditional colonial structure. The effective understanding of a traditionally subordinated group’s identity within an oppressive social framework was instrumental for the development of an emancipatory literacy practice. The information presented in my ethnographic study addresses the first component in the critical literacy framework advocated by Paulo Freire: learning what you are, and what your place is within the world. Mexican-background students revealed the potential to engage literacy instruction based on the literacy abilities they demonstrated outside of the school curriculum. School personnel and Mexican American families have been acting without the formal recognition of how certain practices and beliefs become constructed. Instead, they have been complicit participants in a system of educational and social

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119. See Foley, supra note 36.


123. Id.
subordination of a historically marginalized student population.\textsuperscript{124} Additional research should explore the potential of critical/emancipatory pedagogy as a component of ethnographic research.

A potentially informative research direction could be the investigation of technology for second-language instruction of language-minority populations in schools that are constrained by a lack of knowledge and key personnel for effective second-language learning. The advent of technology in education could allow school personnel who are geographically isolated in a rural setting to access resources that were previously unavailable.\textsuperscript{125} On the other hand, at Willow Grove High School there existed differences in computer usage and access between White and Mexican-background students.\textsuperscript{126} The marginalized status of the Mexican students, and their placement in low-track classes where computers were not used, also entailed their marginalization from potentially useful computer resources.\textsuperscript{127} Technology as a resource for learning or a marker for marginalization merits further investigation.

Some researchers have focused on language loss among elementary-age students,\textsuperscript{128} but research regarding primary-language loss among secondary students is scant. Even though the examination of literacy among students of Mexican background in Willow Grove did not focus on subtractive bilingualism, the investigation of language loss as a factor for high school literacy, as well as parent/family relationships, could help inform theoretical discussions about the school failure and success of Mexican-background students. As my study indicates, the cultural differences that influence a Mexican-background student’s ability to succeed in school involve far more severe constraints to effective literacy instruction than the focus on legal issues. Even though Willow Grove High School followed the letter of the law by providing what it determined to be effective literacy instruction, the education needs of students of Mexican background were not being met as indicated by the disproportionate dropout rate.\textsuperscript{129}

\textsuperscript{124} See Godina, \textit{supra} note 1, at 236.

\textsuperscript{125} \textit{Id}.

\textsuperscript{126} \textit{Id}.

\textsuperscript{127} \textit{Id}.

\textsuperscript{128} See Fillmore, \textit{supra} note 113.

\textsuperscript{129} See Godina, \textit{supra} note 1, at 56.