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The Study of Latino Education

Antonia Darder, PhD

Loyola Marymount University

Rodolfo D. Torres, PhD

The University of California, Irvine

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Antonia Darder, PhD

The University of Texas at Austin

Rodolfo D. Torres, PhD

The University of California, Irvine

Abstract

The article examined issues pertinent to the education of Latina and Latino students in the United States. Key to this discussion is the issue of changing demographics and its relationship to the structure and practice of public schooling in Latino communities. The significant role of the economy and the changing nature of poverty in perpetuating the political dynamics of racialization and other forms of inequalities were considered here, particularly with respect to educational research and public policy concerns central to an emancipatory vision of Latino education. Anchored to this critical lens, the authors call for a critical vision of public policy—one that engages contextually with the cultural, historical, and political dimensions associated with the location of Latinos in the U.S. political economy.

Keywords: Latino education, poverty and education, critical educational policy, Latino education research, emancipatory education

When we study Chicano-Latino history, we are not merely studying the past; we are studying political processes and social conditions originating over a century ago, which continue today.

-Gilbert G. Gonzalez (2013)

Educators across the country continue to grapple with the failure of mainstream education to meet the academic needs of Latino and Latina students across the nation. In the last two decades, a variety of federal and state policy issues have functioned to support culturally assimilative and linguistically restrictive educational policies in the education of Latino students in U.S. schools. As a consequence, the right to bilingual education for language minority students was abolished, while practices associated with federal mandates linked to No Child Left Behind and, then, Race to the Top have reinforced high-stakes testing, standardization of the curriculum, and promoted the privatization of education, by way of corporatized initiatives in support of charter schools. In Arizona, mean-spirited public initiatives against both Chicanos and Latino immigrants encompassed nativist efforts to restrict the use of Spanish in schools and the workplace, the elimination of Mexican American studies at the secondary level, and the banning of books considered to be subversive by conservative educational proponents of curricular and textbook reforms (Aguirre, 2012, Darder 2012). Yet, despite the repressive nature of such policies, the nation must continue to reckon with the impact of changing demographics that point to a future Latino majority population, by the middle of the 21st century.

According the most recent U.S. Census data, the Latino population today is nearly fifty-two million and the largest and youngest ethnic minority population in the United States. The Mexican-origin population is estimated to comprise 67% of the total Latino population.

Moreover, one-in-five schoolchildren and one-in-four newborns is Latino. Never before in the country's history has an ethnic minority group made up so large a share of the youngest population. And these numbers are expected to triple in size, in the next three decades, according to the Pew Research Center (Passel & Cohn, 2008). By 2050, Latinos are projected to become 29% of the U.S. population. Among the 30 million young people, ages 18 to 24, living in the U.S. today, six million (20%) are Latino youth. By the sheer force of numbers, the kinds of adults that Latino students become will dramatically shape the future history of this country, as the former white majority becomes a minority population, at least in terms of number. For, as would be expected, this "new minority" population will still control the lion's share of the nation's wealth, power, and privilege, which is likely to result in new waves of political mobilization in the coming years. In fact, the current struggle that persists in Arizona may well be a bell-weather for the potential backlash that is bound to ensue in others parts of the nation, as the White Anglo-Saxon Protestant population no longer enjoys the political security associated with their past majority status.

It is against this backdrop of intense national debate about the looming specter of the "browning of America," that educators are working to contend with the impact of these demographic changes to the education of Latino students. The subject of Latinos as a growing diasporic population has gained considerable attention in policy circles and theoretical discussions. Recent projections by the Pew Hispanic Center¹ show that 82% of the future Latino population increase will be due to immigrants from Latin America and their U.S.-born descendants (Taylor, Gonzalez-Barrera, Passel, & Lopez 2012). This fact alone should prompt us to acknowledge that the survival and well-being of Latinos in the U.S. is inextricably linked to the well-being of workers in the Caribbean, Mexico, and Latin America. For the difficult economic conditions and the political ramification that many Latino workers must contend with in their countries of origin—historically prompted by U.S. economic policies and targeted investments in those regions and in the states (i.e., in agriculture and construction, for example)—have been catalytic to the increase of migration to the U.S.

Similarly, we cannot ignore the historical impact of U.S. businesses and their commonplace practices of labor exploitation that have stirred the undocumented movement of workers across the U.S./Mexico border. However, it must be noted that this dynamic of the political economy of the border has been a longstanding phenomenon for over a century, one that historically has also driven Puerto Rican, Dominican, and other Latin Americans to make the move north. Consequently, it is the same capitalist economy that shapes conditions of schooling experienced by Latino children in U.S. public schools. Yet, this observation is not new, the author and labor activist Ernesto Galarza² offered such a critique nearly fifty years ago, in his astute analysis of the role of capital in the history of Mexican migration to the United States.

Demographics and Public Schooling

In the nation's public schools, Latino students have reached a new milestone. For the first time, one-in-four (24.7%) public elementary school students are Latino, following similar milestones reached recently by Latinos among public kindergarten students (in 2007) and public nursery school students (in 2006). Among all pre-K through 12th grade public school students, a record 23.9% are Latino. And for the first time, the number of 18- to 24-year-old Latino youth, enrolled in college, exceeded 2 million and reached a record 16.5% of all U.S. college enrollments (Fry & Lopez, 2012). As students in nursery school progress through kindergarten and into elementary school and high school, Latino students are expected to become an even

larger share of public high school students, in the coming years. By 2036, Latinos are projected to comprise one-third of the nation's population of children, ages 3 to 17.³

Yet despite the increasing number of Latino students in U.S. schools, according to the National Center for Education Statistics⁴, 83% of the teaching force of public schools nationally is still White, while only 7% of all classroom teachers are of Latino descent. Hence, nationwide, there is a dramatic underrepresentation of Latino educators across the country. This fact alone should be of dire concern, given the growing number of Latino children who today attend public schools in urban centers such as Los Angeles, Chicago, and New York, where they are not only already the majority, but a rapidly growing percentage of those children who will matriculate into public schools in the next decade.

Moreover, this over-representation of white teachers in public schools is an issue typically ignored or dismissed in the persistent neoliberal culture of Race to the Top and the incessant push for a Common Core curriculum. Accordingly, there is widespread negation of differences in histories, cultural knowledge, and community wisdom of Latino educators and their peers of color—qualities that, when cultivated among both Latino teachers and students, strengthens a sense of self-determination, social agency, teaching confidence, and political empowerment. In the process, teachers of color and their allies are often over-surveilled, finding their voices silenced and cultural views marginalized, when they do not conform to the neoliberal culture of high stakes accountability and the standardization of knowledge—an assimilative culture that functions ultimately to reproduce conditions of inequality and social exclusion within poor and working class Latino communities.

Persistence of Poverty and Inequality

When it comes to inequality, the United States has no equal. A variety of national studies have concluded that one of the most distinctive features of the U.S. economy is the widening gap in income distribution. In fact, inequality has become so extreme that America now resembles the class-stratified societies of early twentieth century Europe. The U.S. economy today continues to generate tremendous wealth, but the wealth does not reach working families. Those in most need, go without health insurance, quality education, and a living wage. One of the most striking features of the growing significance of inequality in the United States seems to be how little most of us know or care about it. Yet, inequality matters; and tackling its persistence and social ramifications is a matter of local, regional and national importance. This is particularly the case for impoverished Latino communities, who comprise one of the most economically and socially disenfranchised populations in U.S. society.

Hence, we argue that poverty is everyone's problem. And while solutions may be maddeningly elusive, the United States ignores poverty at its peril. Today, over 50 million people in the U.S. are living in poverty and this rate is now higher than it was in 1970. In the Latino community, the child poverty rate is 35%; and the total number of Latino children living in poverty is higher than any other minority ethnic group in the United States (Lopez & Velasco 2011). According to the 2010 census, the median wealth of white households is 18 times that of Latino households. The lopsided wealth ratios that exist today are the largest ever seen, since the government began publishing such data a quarter century ago (Domhoff, 2013). And although, the poverty rate among all Latinos is 25%, Puerto Rican and Chicano/Mexicano populations, the two largest Latino groups in the U.S.,⁵ have rates that are actually higher, at 27%. Calling the current economic condition “a full blown crisis,” Imara Jones (2012), in an article for *ColorLines*, argues that “Black and Latino employment is an unmitigated disaster.” More than

one out of seven African Americans is without work and one out of ten Latinos is jobless. When stacked up against white unemployment, the contrast is jarring.

The joblessness amongst Latino youth is even worse. One in five young Latinos is unemployed. In certain cities across the U.S., nearly 50 percent of all youth of color cannot find jobs. Chicago, for example, is one of those cities with one of the highest metropolitan youth unemployment rates in the country. Of course, the overall joblessness is compounded by the historic loss of wealth in Latino communities, due to the recession in 2007. The unprecedented loss of homes and property fueled by the foreclosure crisis has sent black and brown net worth to an all time low. The lack of jobs and other financial resources is making it that much harder for these communities to recover. Economists predict that it will take at least a full generation before Latino and black communities regain what was lost in this last decade. And although the number of Latinos receiving a college degree (9%) has risen (Fry & Taylor 2013), not only does the number of degrees conferred on Latinos still trail most other ethnic groups in the nation, there is also an increasing joblessness rate reported even among college graduates. So, despite reported increases in high school and college graduation rates, Latino youth are still experiencing conditions of persistent inequality in a worsening economic climate.

The process of racialization also works against the interests of Latino communities when it comes to the labor market. Often we hear that the hiring of Latina and Latino workers remains low because employers can't find workers with the education and skills required. Yet, never have there been so many Latinos and Latinas in the U.S. with college degrees. Moreover, a look at the overall national data from the last five years also counters this racializing view, given that it points to massive job shortages at *all levels of education* (Bivens, Fieldhouse, & Shierholz, 2013). While workers with higher levels of education face substantially lower unemployment rates, they too have seen a large percentage increase in unemployment, with rates today that are close to *twice as high* as they were in 2007. These numbers, of course, are even higher for workers of color at every income level.

And although young Latino and Latina students tend to express optimism about their futures and place a high value on education, hard work, and educational success, national studies indicate that they are much more likely than white youth to drop out of school, become teenage parents, live in poverty, have higher levels of exposure to gang activity, experience higher incidences of police profiling and incarceration, and more apt to be targeted for military recruitment; which, incidentally, is justified by military recruiters, given that Latinos are considered to be underrepresented in the armed forces, according to a recent Rand study (Ash, Buck, Klerman, Kleykamp, & Loughran (2009).

One in seven youth nationwide today is considered to be “disconnected,” meaning that they are neither involved in school or work, a percentage that has grown dramatically since the economic recession, according to a report released in 2012 by Measure of America, a Project of the Social Science Research Council.⁶ Nationwide, 5.8 million young people, age 16 to 24, are living on the margins without even part-time jobs. Low-income African American and Latino youth nationally are the most likely to be labeled “disconnected.” The statistics are even more alarming for African American young men: 26 percent are neither in school nor working, compared with 19 percent of young women. However, in the Latino community, more young women (20.3 percent)—many already young mothers—than young men (16.8 percent) are labeled “disconnected.” And, as would be expected, this phenomenon is most prevalent in communities of color where older adults have persistently contended with higher levels of unemployment and economic instability, throughout the nation's history. Hence, with vanishing

opportunities in the labor market, low-income Latino youth are more apt to respond affirmatively to military recruitment efforts, in the hopes of securing future financial stability for themselves and their families.

Yet, current employment and so-called anti-poverty policies are largely based on misperceptions of the problem and a misguided analysis of their sources. Mainstream neo-classical economists continue to burst with confidence about their explanatory powers in social policy. The starting point for most traditional economic analysis is the classic supply and-demand framework—or competitive markets. The hallmark of neoclassical analysis of poverty is the emphasis on this, despite the fact that there are several other supply-side models, including but not limited to human capital. In this model, market forces are independent of institutional constraints and low wages are the result of individual choices made to invest in training or education, in order to improve social and economic status. Thus, the cause of low wages and low occupational status is considered to be the result of non-optimal decision-making practices by individuals, rather than powerful economic structures and a state hegemonic apparatus that sustains and advances gross inequalities, to ensure capital accumulation among the wealthy and powerful social class.

An extension of mainstream economic discourse is the fashionable concept of social capital, often sprinkled glibly in discussions of Latino poverty and schooling. Social capital is a slippery concept, more likely described as a metaphor that generally refers to the formal and informal social and knowledge networks, which enable people to mobilize resources and achieve common goals. Underlying this discourse, however, is a tacit acceptance of the market as a legitimate mechanism by which the successful accumulation of so-called social capital by a disenfranchised population can create the conditions for greater civic engagement, political participation, community mobilization, and social cohesion. Pierre Bourdieu, Glen Loury, James Coleman, and more recently Robert Putnam are among the most pivotal and celebrated scholars associated with the notion of social capital (Portes 1998).⁷ By pushing reliance upon markets, community networks and other forms of social cohesion are transformed into “capital” to be accumulated by the poor. It is important to note here that even in the more progressive employment of the term as symbolic (Bourdieu, 1977), arguments related to social conflict are not necessarily grounded in relations of production or the consequence of capitalist exploitation.

Thus, poverty and many other social problems are considered to be caused by a decline or deficit of social capital. Not unlike, the market model of neoclassical orthodoxy, the individual engagement with social networks and social cohesion occurs outside the context of the geo-political economy and are substituted for discourses, policies, and practices that could genuinely attack material poverty and unequal power. Thus, market-driven policies, as witnessed worldwide, are more likely, if anything, to make our problems worse. Hence, we argue that it makes much more sense to move in promising (although difficult) counterhegemonic directions than to pursue policies, which are more likely to intensify, rather than to solve, two of the most distinctive features of U.S. life today—increasing poverty and social polarization.

What is lacking in the building of flexible decentralization in Latino communities, for example, need not commonsensically imply public-private “partnerships” or other euphemisms for increased marketization. Instead, flexible decentralization can mean empowered participation and democratic renewal in the struggle for emancipatory education for Latino communities. This would indeed be a kind of “third way” between traditional social democratic emphasis on centralized statist regulation of capitalism and anti-statist free market positions. What is needed is an increase, not decrease, in *social regulation* of the market, but a form of

regulation that is executed through empowered forms of popular democratic participation. Ours is a call for the deepening of *democracy*, rather than reliance on a narrow rationality whose primary intent is to extend and advance the interests of the marketplace.

The Dual Nature of Public Education

Despite a dearth of critical discourses within educational policy arenas, there is growing awareness of the Latino population and the increasing political impact that such a population will potentially have on the future of the United States. As mentioned earlier, Latinos are among the youngest and fastest growing ethnic groups in the country. This, in conjunction with their concentration in the most populous states and major metropolitan centers, points to the enormous, albeit still dormant, political power that abides within Latino communities nationwide. Despite generations of protests, activism, and reform efforts, both the historical record and current statistical data confirm the persistence of Latinos among the nation's most educationally and economically disenfranchised groups. Given the growing Latino population and their political potential, why have the conditions of Latino students changed so little over the last five decades?

To respond to the question, we must acknowledge and recognize the dual nature of public education in this country. On one hand, we have a public institution that is market-driven and reproduces class relations of power and inequality. This is orchestrated through the recalcitrant structures of public schools and the traditional cultural values and artifacts of classroom life, which overtly and covertly shape the consciousness of students. As such, students learn to accept uncritically the existing social and material conditions of inequality— conditions that have historically functioned to perpetuate social relations of both dominance and subordination.

On the other hand, public schooling is widely upheld as the promise of upward social mobility, individual privileges, economic opportunities, intellectual development, and personal satisfaction. Education is consistently promulgated as the vehicle for social and material success. In concert with the myth of the *American Dream*, long held as the national ethos, the hidden curriculum encompasses a set of ideals in which freedom is considered to guarantee opportunities for prosperity and success for all. From this perspective, upward social mobility can be earned by all, through individual hard work and perseverance. Hence, public schooling is lauded as the greatest example of the democratic process in action, where anyone in the United States can become educated and hence, economically successful, if only they work hard and meet the academic standards of public schools. In the process, not only does it justify existing inequalities, but also establishes the superior “merit” of the people at the top as the main criterion for achieving success. In addition, it assigns the blame for poverty to the poor themselves, by inferring that they do not possess, genetically or otherwise, enough drive to avail themselves of the educational opportunities so freely offered. What we have here are blatant contradictions that have well served to obscure the actual conditions faced by Latino students and their communities, as well as distort and convolute access to effective solutions for addressing these problems.

Yet, we must also acknowledge that despite such contradictions, many Latino educators, parents, and community organizations have worked through various local and regional efforts to support the academic development and achievement of their children. These efforts reveal the importance that members of the Latino community attach to public schooling, as well as the political development necessary to effect meaningful change. It has been through such efforts

over the past five decades that Latino teachers, parents, and students have developed the critical capacities, social agency, and collective consciousness necessary to interrogate the nature of inequalities and to struggle for educational justice.

Today, we see those efforts at work, for example, in Latino pro-immigrant struggles, where undocumented immigrant youth and their allies have willingly put their personal security and lives on the line, in the struggle for both cultural citizenship and immigrant educational rights. Their courageous efforts over the last decade have led to both heated national debates and expanded dialogues about the rights of undocumented immigrants in this country. And although such pro-immigrant efforts have infused new life into this important Latino issue, these have not been sufficient enough to successfully pass the *Dream Act*, which would provide immigration benefits to those who arrived in the United States as children, before the age of 16 and who have resided in the U.S. continuously, for at least five years prior to the Bill being enacted into Law.

Yet in recognizing the counterhegemonic possibilities of such movements, it is essential that we also acknowledge the failure of these efforts to integrate their educational objectives with a substantive critique of the structural forms of social and economic inequality in the United States. Even the struggle for the Dream Act has been couched around the liberal notion of rights and access to the American Dream, which speaks simply to a so-called pathway or entrance into a structure of growing economic inequality and not to its transformation to a more egalitarian society. Similarly, too often educational demands for a “multicultural” curriculum, bilingual education, and greater participation in school decision-making have been made in a context devoid of critical analysis of the role of public education within a changing political economy. Yet, from the standpoint of a serious historical analysis, it has become glaringly obvious that widespread educational restructuring cannot possibly be accomplished independent of genuinely democratic social and economic reform efforts, grounded in what it means to exist within a genuinely democratic society.

Challenging Deficit Notions

On the basis of such an analysis, it should not be surprising to discover that despite fifty years after civil rights legislation and a multitude of reforms, Latino students continue to lag behind those from the dominant culture. One of the most pervasive aspects of the hegemonic process of racialized class formation is the manner in which students from communities of color continue to be perceived as intellectually and culturally deficient. Long held perceptions of Mexican children in the early 20th century as a “Mexican Problem” has been well documented by historian Gilbert G. Gonzalez (2013). Today, a myriad of deficit notions, wittingly and unwittingly, continue to permeate the pedagogy, curriculum, and classroom life of Latino students, particularly those from working-class communities of modest means. In the 21st century the “Mexican Problem” has become the “Hispanic Problem” in which notions of cognitive deficiencies pervade public debate on immigration reform.⁸ The disabling impact of deficit notions are readily apparent by the huge number of Latino students who sincerely believe that the reason they do poorly academically is because they are “dumb” or intellectually inferior. As a consequence, the victim-blaming ideology associated with the traditional process of racialization in schools is well internalized, resulting in the prodigiously touted academic achievement gap, with its alarming disparities.

Disparities are then reflected by a variety of so-called “evidence-based” measures. For example, on measures of reading and writing proficiency, Latino students are twice as likely as white students to score at below basic levels. Test scores are liberally employed to demonstrate

the achievement gap among racialized populations. Across all testing categories, students of color are found to lag behind. Suspension and expulsion rates for Black and Latino students are deplorable, reflecting the untenable circumstances of their treatment with respect to school discipline. Meanwhile, dropout rates remain stubbornly high, with over 40 percent of all Latinos over the age of nineteen years having no high school diploma (Cardenas & Kirby, 2012).

Despite the hopeful desegregation reform efforts initiated by the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision in the 1950s, the proportion of Latino students attending segregated public schools has actually increased in the last twenty years, particularly in large urban school districts, where Latino student enrollments are now heavily concentrated⁹. Latino students have become the new face of segregation. Meanwhile, the proportion of Latino students enrolled in colleges and universities and those who graduate from high school prepared for college admission still remains low. And despite increases in educational attainment in recent years, the body of research in the field well attests that the educational conditions of Latino and Latina students have remained chronic over the last fifty years.

Nevertheless, we adamantly reject the notion that this persistence of low achievement and failure can be explained primarily by reference to the inherent nature or culture of Latino communities. In the past, these victim-blaming perspectives were the most common conclusions drawn from social science research on the academic difficulties of Latino students. Too often culturally deterministic views that engendered such research simply functioned to perpetuate racialized perceptions that further disenfranchised students from racialized communities. And although today, there is a plethora of critical research emerging on the education of Latina and Latino students, mainstream educational policies and practices often reflect, albeit in more sophisticated terms, views that still echo the inferiority attributed historically to these communities. In contrast, seldom are there serious educational proclamations for structural change in the schooling of Latino students, beyond neoliberal solutions that commodify knowledge, instrumentalize teaching, and convert students into clients and their parents into stakeholders—as if they genuinely had the decisive power to determine their educational possibilities, without a change in the underlying structures of inequality that persist.

More recent historical investigations have revealed not only the persistence of a pattern of discrimination against Latinos in public education, but also expressions of social agency and community resistance among Latino parents. As the United States established control over and integrated the territories it took from Mexico and Spain in the nineteenth century, Latinos were directly affected. At the end of this period, as public school systems were established, similar patterns of disenfranchisement emerged. A poignant example is Mexican Americans in the Southwest who, despite a shared belief in the value of public education, faced major obstacles. As economic conditions permitted, these parents presented their children for enrollment, but often found that their children were either not accepted or segregated and, more often than not, provided only a substandard education. In frustration, some Latino parents turned to Catholic schools, in the hopes that this would afford their children a better opportunity. Since, only a limited number of children were accepted into parochial schools—which, incidentally, often reflected many of the same racializing deficit notions—the majority of Latino parents were forced to seek other ways to advocate on behalf of their children.

This contradicts the mainstream notion that Mexican American and other Latino parents willingly acquiesced to the debilitating conditions their children faced in schools. In fact, the reality is that since the 1920s, Latinos have used political pressure and the legal system to struggle for equal treatment in schools. This is significant because it also contradicts the

misguided conclusions of social science research, which assert the low value placed on education by Latino communities. So if the situation is actually that Latinos share the belief in the value of education, and if they have acted on this belief to assure their children equal treatment in schools, how then can we approach understanding the persistent problems that Latino students face in public education today?

Latino Educational Research

Much of the theoretical and policy discourse related to Latinos and schooling has revolved around issues of cultural and linguistic difference. Unfortunately, these discussions have oftentimes been founded on myopic perspectives which have engaged the Latino population in the United States as a monolithic entity. The consequence has been to perpetuate static notions of culture. Such ahistorical and apolitical discussions have generally failed to link notions of culture and language with a structural analysis of socioeconomic conditions in the United States.

It is important to note that much of the study of Latino populations emerges out of conditions that can best be described as academic colonialism—conditions for legitimation that require knowledge construction to be formulated along the very same traditional social science methods that have generated many of the existing problems in the first place. It is this colonizing dimension of the academy that has been consistently challenged by Chicano/Latino studies programs. These programs have historically called for a new paradigm for academic scholarship in the field; one that addresses the problems inherent in traditional standards of legitimation and questions the disciplinary parameters defined by the academic enterprise in general.

One of the central issues in the struggle to reconstruct the foundations of research approaches to the study of Latinos has been the need for a new lexicon to describe the phenomenon of subordinate groups. What this coming to a new language implies is the breaking away from disciplinary methodologies and racialized epistemologies of difference predicated on existing structural inequalities. For example, if we consider the literature of the civil rights era and the era of multiculturalism, what is consistently reflected are deeply racialized discourses, which still remain grounded, albeit more loosely, in dichotomous black/white relations. As such, this has perpetuated a structural invisibility with respect to the role of Latino scholarship in larger debates of educational theory and practice.

Moreover, in addressing the need for a new language, there are specific elements which this process encompasses. First of all, it is a discourse that is recognized as both simultaneously contextual and contested, and which challenges static and essentialized notions of culture, identity, and language. Secondly, it is rooted in the centrality of the political economy as a significant foundation for understanding how issues of cultural change and ethnicity intersect with broader structural imperatives of late capitalism. Thirdly, it calls for a rethinking of categories such as “race” and “ethnicity” with respect to the manner in which these can either function to obstruct or further the political project for cultural and economic democracy in this country. And lastly, such a discourse argues for the redefining of a “working canon” of Latino education that is grounded in a critical discourse that avoids the analytical pitfalls and essentialisms of past educational discourses of multiculturalism.

In order to address the growing needs of Latino students, Latino educational studies must be placed within the larger context of both the United States and the world-wide political economy. To do this requires that we link educational practices to the structural dimensions that shape daily institutional life. By doing so, we can better understand and contend with the

manner in which these economic structures and class relations are consistently evolving in the process of capitalist accumulation. This points to a fundamental flaw present in much of the educational literature on Latinos—a failure to engage the link between U.S. education and capitalism, with its structural inequalities of racialized class and power relations.

It is important to note that there also exists a crucial link between economic changes in this country and the economic restructuring that is occurring worldwide. This calls for new efforts to understand advancing class structures of “post-industrial” societies and changing processes of neoliberal stratification and social mobility. Needless to say, educational policy considerations are central to the above project as they relate to rethinking the deepening globalization of production, the breakup of working class communities, and the limits and contradictions of state intervention in late-twentieth-century capitalism.

While we cannot ignore that the future of schools will be conditioned by social and economic changes, it is by no means predetermined by those changes. A political and ideological battlefield surrounding the role of schools in the changing economy remains. Researchers who are seeking to discover ways to effectively improve the educational conditions of Latino students cannot afford to shy away from entering into this murky realm of contestation that gives shape to the terrain of American public schooling.

Racism, with its perpetuation of racialized, social relations, within the context of the changing global economic picture, is another factor that deeply impacts the nature of educational research and schooling practices within Latino communities. Thus, from a historical view of public education what becomes quickly apparent is that racism cannot be confronted outside of the structural imperatives of class relations and the political reality of the nation state (Darder & Torres, 2004; Miles, 1993; Sanchez G., 1943). Cultural identity and notions of ethnicity are partly politically formed, rather than embedded in the color of the skin or a given nature. Hence, it is impossible to comprehend the social construction of Latino identities and the impact of schooling upon Latino students without critically addressing the context of racialized capitalist relations that give rise to public and private forms of education in the United States. In this era of neoliberalism and growing inequality, education reform must be conducted through a framework that critically interrogates the ideological and material underpinnings of the hidden curriculum of schooling. This constitutes a call for a politics of education that dares to imagine a genuinely democratic future for Latino communities in the U.S.

A Critical Vision of Educational Public Policy

In the sphere of U.S. education today, there persists a dire need to provide an ideological critique of educational public policymaking and the role of the state in systematically perpetuating inequality. This requires a move to recast, in more critical and contextual ways, public policy debates related to public schooling and the academic achievement of Latina and Latino students. By so doing, Latino educational policy discussions related to issues such as bilingual education, immigration, affirmative action, the recruitment and retention of students, curricular politics, teacher education, and English-only initiatives are linked to questions of political power and material consequences.

Furthermore, Latino educational public policy debates cannot be single issue oriented; when we treat educational policy issues in isolation, we are unable to effectively mobilize an agenda that supports educational justice and democratic schooling. Instead, the relationship between a variety of public policy concerns must be addressed contextually with respect to the cultural, historical, and political dimensions directly associated with the structural position of

Latinos in the U.S. political economy. What underpins the necessity for such an approach is the recognition that similar hegemonic forces of social control move across all public policy issues. Hence, this reinforces the need for coalition building across cultural/ethnic/national ties in efforts to address the social inequities inherent in the educational experience of Latino students.

Central to a critical vision of public policy is the reconceptualization of the role of the state in educational reform. This is truer today than ever before, as we contend with the troublesome impact of No Child Left Behind and its successor, Race to the Top. The articulation of such a vision means infusing public policy debates with a new set of frameworks from which to embark. More specifically, this points to a political process that can incorporate a politics of social change, political practices and community movements for social justice, structural educational reform goals, and an overall compounding commitment to genuine equality in American society.

Public policy debates must be formulated in conjunction with social change politics. Public policy reforms devoid of a politics of social change and a theory of social movements constitute limited efforts toward democratizing education. Unfortunately, most reform debates are essentially grounded in liberal theories of the state. This inevitably leads to limited reform due to their failure to fundamentally challenge the economic and political practices of the elites. Further, despite the contributions of identity politics to rethinking the nature of Latino schooling, public policy informed by decontextualized, static, and monolithic views of Latino identity can potentially function as nothing more than an analytical and political trap which ultimately leads to a dead-end system of reform.

Unfortunately, the majority of current public policy in the United States is not linked to social justice practice or community movements for educational change. Instead, most public policy is overwhelmingly driven by the political and economic interests of the existing social order, which most often places it in direct contradiction (or opposition) to social movements striving to democratize public institutions, including public education. Although it can be said that in recent years social movements have indeed led to some minor changes in institutional practices, these reforms have nevertheless failed to change the fundamental nature of structural inequality in the United States. There is no question that public policy processes must be democratized. To accomplish this, public policymakers must acknowledge and incorporate the political concerns and issues of Latino community movements in the articulation and design of public policy. Along the same lines, community social movements must acknowledge the political centrality of their role in shifting the educational public policy debate from the hands of the elite policymakers to a critical process and practice of democratic participation.

The absence of a systematic analysis of class relations with its structural inequalities of income and power represents a serious shortcoming of contemporary public educational policy. Given this absence of critical analysis, it is imperative that educational public policy be committed to the goals of structural economic reform. An understanding of the political economy of schooling and the historical conditions which inform current educational practices can enable educators to better reconceptualize the role of public policy in the reconstruction of an educational agenda linked to social justice and economic democracy.

However, to fully understand the changing nature of poverty, it is important to see it, in part, as the result of inherent structural features of macroeconomic forces and trends. Tackling the problem(s) of poverty with its structural inequalities of class and power will require the marshaling of new social formations and movements with a consciously articulated democratic agenda to make poverty history. Perhaps it is time to consider some radical and democratic

alternatives and think hard about what works and what doesn't. The urgency of the problem requires that these questions be critically addressed, directly and openly. Undoubtedly, the educational public policy and practices that would emerge from such a critical vision would come at an enormous cost and substantial risk to the status quo—but it would carry real potential for substantive gains to economic and democratic reforms in establishing the conditions for educational justice and emancipatory possibilities for Latinos communities in the United States.

Antonia Darder is a distinguished international Freirian scholar. Her scholarship focuses on critical issues of racism, political economy, social justice, and education. She is the author of *Culture and Power in the Classroom*, *Reinventing Paulo Freire: A Pedagogy of Love*, and *A Dissident Voice: Essays on Culture, Pedagogy, and Power*; co-author of *After Race: Racism After Multiculturalism*; and co-editor of *The Critical Pedagogy Reader*, and *Latinos and Education: A Critical Reader*.

Rodolfo D. Torres is a recipient of the prestigious Adam Smith Foundation Fellowship, University of Glasgow, Scotland. His current research areas include: Latino Urbanism, Direct Economic Democracy and Alternative Futures, Mexican American politics, and Marxist and anarchist inspired political economy. He is co-author of *Latino Metropolis, Savage State: Welfare Capitalism & Inequality*, *After Race: Racism After Multiculturalism*, and *The Latino Question*; and co-author of *Latinos and Education: A Critical Reader*.

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¹ Founded in 2001, the Pew Hispanic Center is a nonpartisan research organization that seeks to improve understanding of the U.S. Hispanic population and to chronicle Latinos' growing impact on the nation. See: <http://www.pewhispanic.org/>

² See the new volume of Ernesto Galarza's writings, *Man of Fire: Selected Writings*, edited by A. Ibarra and R. D. Torres. Urbana, Springfield, Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press.

³ See: [U.S. Census Bureau, 2008](#) data.

⁴ See: National Center for Education Statistics' data on Schools and Staffing. See: http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/sass/tables/sass0708_029_t12n.asp

⁵ See: Report issued by the Pew Foundation in 2012 entitled: *The Ten Largest Hispanic Origin Groups*. See: <http://www.pewhispanic.org/2012/06/27/the-10-largest-hispanic-origin-groups-characteristics-rankings-top-counties/>

⁶ Access report on Measure of America: A project of the Social Science Research Council website: See: <http://www.measureofamerica.org/one-in-seven/>

⁷ See: Portes, A. (1998). *Social Capital: Its Origins and Application in Modern Sociology in Annual Review of Sociology*. Vol 24, pp. 1-24. See: <http://www.soc.washington.edu/users/matsueda/Portes.pdf>

⁸ This issue of deficient intelligence among Latino immigrant re surfaced in 2013 public debates spurred on by Harvard graduate Jason Richwine, whose doctoral dissertation advanced the notion of that Hispanic populations has lower IQs than whites. This argument is in the tradition of scientific racism formerly advanced by Bell Curve co-author, Charles Murray, Richwine's mentor at Harvard. This came to public attention after Richwine co-authored an immigration policy report for the conservative think tank, the Heritage Foundation. For several thoughtful critiques of racism and intelligence testing see *Chicano Education in the Era of Segregation* (Gonzalez, 2013, 2nd edition) and *Culture and Power in the Classroom* (Darder 2013, 2nd edition).

⁹ A report recently released by The Civil Rights Project, *E Pluribus...Separation: Deepening Double Segregation for Students*, "shows that segregation has increased seriously across the country for Latino students, who are attending more intensely segregated and impoverished schools than they have for generations." To access the report see: <http://civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/research/k-12-education/integration-and-diversity/mlk-national/e-pluribus...separation-deepening-double-segregation-for-more-students/>