



# Educating Newcomers

**Immigrant Children in U.S. Schools**  
*Eugene E. García*

**Struggling to Open Doors and Minds**  
*William Celis III*

**Stories of War and Schooling:  
The Children Left Behind**  
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**What Do We Mean by  
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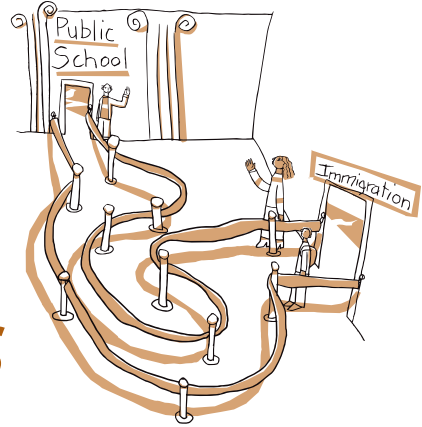
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## Educating Newcomers



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# Educating Newcomers

Robert Rothman

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Over the past two years Americans have been engaging in one of the nation’s periodic debates on immigration. As usual, the debate combines lofty rhetoric about the United States as a nation of immigrants with xenophobic calls to keep “them” out. Two images, representing these contrasting views, come to mind: hundreds of thousands of immigrants marching in Los Angeles and other cities to protest legislation that would have made illegal entry into the U.S. a felony, and a 700-mile fence along the U.S.-Mexican border.

The debate over immigration has particular resonance for the estimated 8 million newcomers or children of newcomers in U.S. schools. Of course, this is not a new phenomenon. In the first decade of the twentieth century, for example, an estimated two-thirds of the school population in New York City had fathers who were born outside of the United States. The massive influx of newcomers at that time led to a number of reforms aimed at enabling schools and school systems to accommodate the burgeoning school population – and, not coincidentally, to help “Americanize” the newcomers.

The current population of newcomers poses challenges for education systems as well. For one thing, the population is much more diverse than the immigrants who arrived a century ago. Students arriving in school today come from nearly every continent and speak a rich array of languages. Their

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educational backgrounds are diverse, as well; some have had extensive schooling in their home countries and some have limited formal education.

The students also bring with them knowledge and culture that ought to be considered educational assets. But schools seldom try to understand students' backgrounds, and when they do, they often consider them liabilities to shed, rather than funds of knowledge to build on.

This issue of *Voices in Urban Education* examines ways to educate newcomers and brings together a range of perspectives.

Eugene García takes stock of the immigrant population in U.S. schools and surveys research on their experiences as students.

William Celis shows how immigrant students find opportunities even as they struggle to overcome hostility and inadequate services.

Alina Newman provides vivid examples of children from war-torn and impoverished Central American and Caribbean countries to show that students' backgrounds affect their learning in ways that educators seldom see.

Margarita Calderón outlines a successful program for adolescent English-language learners that suggests principles for teaching such students effectively.

Lorna Fast Buffalo Horse shows how a school turned itself around by getting to know all students



as individuals and celebrating, rather than dismissing, their linguistic backgrounds.

These essays underscore the diversity of the immigrant student population by showing how students' backgrounds – and schools' responses to these backgrounds – affected the students' ability to make the transition to the United States and succeed educationally. The stories of children in Alina Newman's and Lorna Fast Buffalo Horse's articles, in particular, illustrate the unique strengths and needs each child brings to school.

The challenges the students face, even in schools that are reasonably successful, suggest that other organizations have a role to play as well. Schools should not be the only institutions responsible for ensuring that children arriving to the United States can make the transition and be prepared to learn what they need in order to succeed. City agencies, community-based organizations, businesses, and higher-education institutions can also support children and families.

The hundreds of thousands who marched through Los Angeles last year served notice that we all have a responsibility to all children, regardless of their backgrounds. It's time we all joined together to fulfill that responsibility.

# Immigrant Children in U.S. Schools

Eugene E. García

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*A close look at the research on immigrant children shows the challenges they face in schools and the challenges schools face in educating an incredibly diverse population.*

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**T**he United States has long been a nation of incredible cultural and linguistic diversity. This trend of ethnic and racial population diversification continues most rapidly among its young and school-age children. The demographic transformation that has become more evident in the last decade was easily foreseen at least ten years ago. Our future student growth is as predictable: in a mere thirty-five years, White students will be a minority in every category of public education as we know it today.

Unfortunately, the students who form an emerging ethnic and racial majority continue to be “at risk” in today’s social institutions. Much more eloquent than any quantitative analyses of this situation is a recent letter from a new high school English teacher in Los Angeles to a former colleague:

Hi . . .

Here’s the report from the Western Front. Please pass it around.

What I initially perceived to be innovative use of year-round scheduling seems to be more mechanization run amok. Although they apparently were able to split the kids into three separate tracks with different vacations with little or no problem, the track system has virtually NO academic benefit, at least the way it operates here. There are about 600 9th and 10th graders per track and about 200 11th and 12th graders per track. Look at the dropout rate (near 50 percent if not more). And the school just received a 3-year accreditation rather than 7-year so things are pretty bad.

In short, this school and school district are nightmares.

Reading and writing levels are grotesque. I have only four students who are operating above grade level who could function in an honors program. That’s out of 150 on the rolls.

The dress code is not enforced . . . gangster wear is the norm, not the exception . . . and the administration, besides making occasional announcements, does nothing . . . thus none of the teachers care to stir the pot by even trying to enforce dress codes. Tardies are not enforced. This is LA and despite that kids are wandering through the halls and all over the campus

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all the time. There is one computer lab for math, four or five computers in the library and that's about it. The textbooks left for me to use were 1980 copyright 10th grade lit books, and there were only enough for a classroom set. And, of course, all except one of the short stories was about teenage white (male) characters, and these kids Just Don't Relate to that. Plus, despite this being a major ESL school, no supplementary resources "enrichment" materials exist that I can find that contain black or brown or multi-national short stories or poems. . . . They do know the main players in the OJ drama, but one must be careful here when making allusions to that. The Maya Angelou books were in pieces. The book accountability procedures here are non-existent.

There is one counselor per 1,000 students, an ESL program for half the students that doesn't seem to be upticking tests scores or achievement. Half the kids don't bring ANYTHING to school let alone pens and paper; forget assigning homework. I have 21 students with perfect attendance and no discipline problems. Half of them turn in work that is perhaps 4th or 5th grade level; the others don't turn in anything at all. But they are all there every day. I asked other teachers what to do about grades. Well, if they make it every day, pass them with a D even if they don't do anything. Other kids I see one day and

then don't see them again for two weeks. The sixth period English class has 37 students on the roll and I have an average of 14-17 in daily regular attendance.

There are few AP classes but few students pass the tests. Kids who miss school for field trips and football games are not listed on an excuse sheet nor is there any other official notification. They just tell you they were on a field trip and you mark the grade book accordingly. I guess.

Very few – perhaps 10 percent – of the kids are black and so far the only white kids are from Armenia or Russia with the occasional native white kids spotted here and there. I asked the Union Steward if all the schools were as screwed up as this one. He said that he has taught only here but that he hears it is the same way – but the sad thing is that it doesn't have to be that way. Indeed. The English teachers here are solid, intelligent, and superb. But they all tell me to forget everything I know and just do the best you can with what tools you have and forget how it could be. The faculty has rich experience, but I have never seen so many good ideas from attendance to technology disappear into such a black hole of central administrative and school administrative ennui.

These kids are sweet. What lives they have led. So many are from El Salvador, fleeing the government violence. The native speakers are incredibly poor, but sweet kids. One kid, who works harder than any kid I have ever seen, literally just got off the boat from Korea in August. Another kid, from El Salvador, is as bright as the brightest I ever had. . . . I would give anything to get that kid out of here. . . . I have had the weird experience of having collaborative group work on short stories conducted in spoken languages other than English and then each group reports back to the entire class in English. But kids are kids. It's too bad this system here just processes them through, like the Pink Floyd mechanized conveyor belt "We don't need no education" song, but on a bad drug trip. (J. L. Walters, personal communication, 2000)

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Culturally, immigrants significantly reshape the ethos of their new communities. This is perhaps the hardest aspect of immigration for nonimmigrant citizens. For various psychosocial reasons, immigrants are, inevitably, active agents of change.

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### ***Characteristics of Immigrants***

The experience of immigration is not new to generations of Americans. However, for bilingual students, it has and continues to be an ongoing experience with particular attributes that influence present generations of immigrants as well as important lingering effects for second and third generations.

Immigration today is part of an increasingly transnational phenomenon based on borderless economies, new communication technologies, and new systems of mass transportation. In recent years anthropologists, not always with robust data or analytical rigor, have been arguing that the “new immigrants” are key actors in a new transnational stage (Portes 1996; Suarez-Orozco 1997). Today, there is much more massive back-and-forth movement between nations – not only of people but also of goods, information, and symbols – than ever before. Compared to many Hispanic immigrants today,

the European immigrants of the last century simply could not maintain the level and intensity of contact with the “old country” that is now possible. Furthermore, the ongoing characteristics of Hispanic immigration to the United States constantly “replenishes” social practices and cultural models that would otherwise tend to ossify. In certain areas of the Southwest and Southeast, Hispanic immigration is generating a powerful infrastructure dominated by a growing Spanish-speaking mass media, new market dynamics, and new cultural identities.

Culturally, immigrants significantly reshape the ethos of their new communities. This is perhaps the hardest aspect of immigration for nonimmigrant citizens. For various psychosocial reasons, immigrants are, inevitably, active agents of change. We know much more – empirically and theoretically – about how the process of immigration changes immigrants than about how immigrants change their host communities. But there is little doubt that they do so. In large cities like Los Angeles and small communities like Watsonville,



California, a Sunday afternoon walk through some local parks resembles the same walk (sights, sounds, food, play, etc.) in Mexico City or Guadalajara.

Another feature of the new immigration to the United States is that immigrants today are entering a nation that is economically, socially, and culturally unlike the country which absorbed – however ambivalently – previous waves of immigrants. Also significant is the increasingly segregated concentration of large numbers of immigrants in a handful of regions. Waldinger and Bozorgmehr (1996) have argued that as a result of the increasing segmentation of the economy and society, many low-skilled new immigrants “have become more, not less, likely to live and work in environments that have grown increasingly segregated from whites” (p. 20).

Yet another way the new immigrant experience seems incommensurable with earlier patterns relates to the cultural ethos today’s immigrants encounter. New immigrants are enter-

ing U.S. society at a time when what we might term a “culture of multiculturalism” permeates the public space. Certainly, a century ago there were no major cultural models celebrating “ethnic pride.” Nathan Glazer said it all in the wonderfully sarcastic title of his latest book, *We Are All Multiculturalists Now*. Some observers are afraid that these new cultural models and social practices tend to undermine “old-fashioned” assimilation, American style (Chavez 1995).

It is, however, far from clear how the new “culture of multiculturalism” will affect, if at all, the long-term adaptations of immigrants and, especially, their children. Employers in Miami, with its large concentration of Spanish speakers, have trouble finding competent office workers with the ability to function in professional Spanish (Fradd 1997). The issue of course is that immigrant children today are likely to rapidly learn English – or a version of it anyway – *while* they lose their mother tongue (Snow 1997).

### ***Immigrant Students – U.S. Schools***

In 2001 the U.S. Department of Education reported that the number of children in public schools had grown by nearly 8 million in the last two decades (García 2001b). While it has been suggested that this increase is the result of the children of baby boomers reaching school age, it is clear from the U.S. Census Bureau Current Population Survey that immigration policy explains the growth in the number of children in public schools (García 2001b). The same data indicate that 8.6 million school-age children (ages 5 to 17) are first-generation immigrants. While

fewer than one-third of the 8.6 million children are immigrants themselves, the children of immigrants account for such a large percentage of the school-age population because a higher proportion of immigrant women are in their childbearing years and immigrants tend to have more children than non-immigrants. In addition, the effect of immigration on public schools will be even larger in the coming years because 17.6 percent of children approaching school age have immigrant mothers.

An increasingly diverse student population is entering the schools at the same time as a record number of students in general (the baby-boom echo, a term used by demographers referring to children of the original baby boomers) are entering school. Thus, schools already struggling with the influx of immigrant students are also facing the strains of high overall enrollments.

The term *immigrant* includes only those students (including refugees) born outside the United States. Because of restrictive immigration laws, most new arrivals in the nineteenth century through the first half of the twentieth were from Europe. Following important changes in America's immigration laws in the mid-1960s, however, this pattern changed dramatically, contributing to a new period of large-scale immigration that shows no signs of abating soon. Immigrants to the United States now come from all over the globe, with the nations of Asia and Latin America supplanting those of Europe as primary sources of new arrivals.

Ruiz-de-Velasco and Fix (2000) report that in 1997 20 percent of school-age children in U.S. schools were children of at least one immigrant parent, a share that tripled between 1970

and 1997. Of these students, 40 percent are bilingual. This same analysis confirms that there is a decline in bilingual students across generations, with some 10 percent of them falling in the third-generation category (Ruiz-de-Velasco & Fix 2000). However, bilingual status among second- and third-generation students varies across immigrant group. For example, Mexican immigrant students are twice as likely to be bilingual as Asian immigrant students. In general, the continued extensive presence of bilingual students in the United States is driven primarily by ongoing immigration and bilingual status among some groups that extends beyond the first generation.

There are two very important dimensions to this new pattern of immigration that are related to educational issues. First, recent immigrants are simultaneously more educated and less educated than native-born Americans – a higher percentage of immigrants than native-born Americans have a bachelor's or graduate degree, while a higher percentage of immigrants also have not completed high school (Ruiz-de-Velasco & Fix 2000).

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Second, recent immigrants with high levels of education are disproportionately from several nations in East and South Asia, while those with little schooling are largely from a number of Latin American countries. This is of great significance educationally. Children from families in which the parents have a great deal of education tend to achieve at much higher levels in school than children from families in which the parents have little formal schooling (Rumbaut 1997). Low levels of educational attainment are especially consequential for Mexican immigrants. They represent our largest immigrant group and one of the least well educated.

The large differences in education levels among immigrant groups are clearly illustrated in 2000 census data (Ruiz-de-Velasco & Fix 2000). Among 25- to 29-year-old immigrants (a segment that includes many families with preschool or school-age children), 43 percent of the Asians had a bachelor's degree or more, while only 12 percent

had less than a high school diploma. In contrast, just 4 percent of the young adult immigrants from Mexico had a college degree, while 62 percent had not completed high school. These percentages were 12 percent and 33 percent, respectively, for other Hispanic young adult immigrants (García 2001a).

Valdes (1996, 1998) studied Hispanic immigrant families and the schooling of their children. In the larger study, Valdes (1996) focused on two males and two females. Her study took place during a two-year period and involved three middle schools, four newly arrived Latino focal children and their classmates, four different English-language teaching specialists (ESL teachers), and numerous subject-matter teachers who had the focal children in class. The study also involved interviews with school personnel, the students themselves, and their parents. Part of the study's purpose was to examine how immigrant children who arrive in this country with "zero" English acquire English in schools. To address this issue, Valdes (1998) selected a middle school undergoing rapid population shift and students aged twelve to fourteen. Two immigrant Hispanic students – one of Mexican origin and one of Honduran origin – participated in this research over a seven-year period.

Lilian, the student of Mexican origin, was twelve years old when she first arrived at her California school. Previously a student in Mexico, she had considerable reading ability in Spanish but almost no English-language or reading skills. Elisa, a thirteen-year-old Honduran immigrant, had completed sixth grade in her native country and also had considerable reading and writing experience in Spanish. Both Lilian and Elisa were eager to go to school and to learn English.



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## Students had difficulty escaping “the ESL ghetto.” This phenomenon is a common one for many Hispanic immigrant students: They are placed repeatedly in courses that emphasize English-language acquisition at the expense of grade-level instruction.

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For each of these students, mastery of English became the predominant theme in their schooling experience. Valdes (1998) concludes that both students had difficulty escaping “the ESL ghetto.” This phenomenon is a common one for many Hispanic immigrant students: They are placed repeatedly in courses that emphasize English-language acquisition at the expense of grade-level instruction in subject-matter domains. The result for both Lilian and Elisa was predictable, although Lilian dropped out of school at the age of fifteen while Elisa finished high school but has only recently begun to attend a community college, where her measured lack of English on a required placement test has forced her to enroll in more ESL courses. Valdes (1998, p. 11) was led to conclude that “the students who had looked forward to schooling in the United States were disappointed.”

Olsen (1997), in a study similar to those of Valdes (1996, 1998), followed a cohort of immigrant Hispanic and Asian students through their high school experience at Madison High, an urban school in northern California. This study attempted to address the issues of becoming “American” in the world of immigrant students and their

instructors and curricula. In the words of Olsen (1997, p. 239),

The study illustrates efforts and heartbreaks of those engaged in activity to provide more educational opportunity and equal access to schooling for immigrants, as well as the confusion, blindness, and concerns of those who resist changing their ways for them.

The study of Madison High offered a hard look at the ways in which schools still track and determine very different futures based on race, class, and language. Immigrant students seemed to spend their educational time relegated to classes taught entirely in English in which they were unlikely to thrive or in separate “sheltered” English classes where the emphasis was on English-language development with little or no emphasis on grade-level curricula. Immigrant students themselves reported that the key to becoming American was simply to learn English. At the same time, teachers emphasized that the key to educational success was the mastery of basic skills and subject-matter content. These teachers reported “seeing” students divided into academic levels that were a result of a student’s individual choice and effort. In essence, any student can be successful – achieve at high levels – if they choose to do so and work hard. These teachers’ view of achievement contrasted drastically with immigrant students’ experiences: “Pick your race and take your place” (Olsen 1997, p. 241).

More specifically, Olsen concludes that the immigrant student experience is yet another important reflection of race and class negotiations and stratification in U. S. high schools that serve a diverse socioeconomic, racial, ethnic, and immigrant student body. Yet, particularly for immigrant students, taking one's place in the racial and socioeconomic hierarchy seemed coupled with:

1. The exclusion and separation of immigrants academically
2. The extreme pressure to give up national identity and language

Olsen (1997) is quick to point out that these phenomena are not uncontested. Students do try to rise to and overcome this challenge. And as Rumbaut (1997) indicates, some do. At Madison High, Hispanic immigrants were not likely to do so (Olsen 1997).

While immigration's influence on social, economic, health, and education issues continues to be the subject of intense national debate, there can be no doubt that the large number of immigrants now living in the United States represents an enormous challenge. With more than half of post-1970 immigrants and their U.S.-born children living in or near poverty and one-third having no health insurance, the situation for immigrant families is clearly precarious. Without major changes in present immigration patterns, the Census Bureau projects that 11 to 12 million immigrants will arrive in the next decade alone (Camarota 2001). Thus, the influence of immigrant students in U.S. schools will continue to grow.

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# Struggling to Open Doors and Minds

William Celis III

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*Although immigrant children face uneven services and, sometimes, hostility, a school in San Antonio offers glimmers of hope.*

**A**t the start of the school year, Brentwood Middle School principal Gustavo M. Cordova stood before his 700 seventh- and eighth-graders, at least a third of whom are either immigrants or children of immigrants, and issued a challenge: Do your best, he told his working-class students on San Antonio's blue-collar West Side. I know you can do it because I did it, and I'm just like you. I'm an immigrant.

Not only is the thirty-eight-year-old Cordova an immigrant, born in Mexico City, but he entered the country as an illegal with his single mother. With the help of friends in Texas, mother and infant Gustavo made their way through Laredo customs and his mother replied "yes" when custom agents asked her if she was a U.S. citizen. Borders were more porous then than now; customs agents didn't even ask for proof of citizenship. They traveled as far as San Antonio, where she and her son became U.S. citizens, and Cordova earned a bachelor's degree, then a master's degree, en route to a career in public school administration.

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## ***New Challenges for Both Schools and Immigrant Students***

Cordova's journey will be difficult to equal in the years ahead. Immigrant students who collectively bring with them the greatest diversity ever seen in schools also face the greatest set of challenges (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco 2001). New students face not only mandated federal and state testing, they also must struggle with uneven school services, and they will, in some instances, confront hostile schools and teachers.

In a Rancho Palos Verdes, California, elementary school, for example, a wing in which Spanish-language students are taught has been labeled "Tijuana Hill" by the school's White teachers; so stigmatized is the bilingual program at the school that some Latino teachers refuse to teach immigrant children. New York City schools struggle to accommodate their record numbers of Eastern European children and youth; Minneapolis–St. Paul, Milwaukee, and other upper Midwest cities scramble to find teachers and aides to teach their Hmong students; Seattle, Portland, and San Francisco confront an influx of Vietnamese, Chinese, and Korean



students; Los Angeles, Phoenix, San Antonio, and cities and towns in between enroll record numbers of Mexican and Central American immigrants (U.S. Dept. of Ed. 2006).

### **Growth in Numbers and Diversity of Immigrant Children**

Whether immigrants are in the country legally or illegally, a soon-to-be released study by the Harvard Immigration Project (Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco & Louie, forthcoming) suggests that the influence of newcomers and pressure on schools will only grow. One in every five children under the age of eighteen is now an immigrant or a child of immigrants; by 2040, that ratio will increase to one in every three. The same study found more than 190 countries are represented in New York City public schools, and more than ninety languages are spoken in the Los Angeles Unified School District.



Sliced a different way, data show that 13.7 million children under eighteen are either immigrants or the American-born offspring of immigrants, and that immigrant children and youth – Hispanic immigrants in particular – are the fastest-growing student population (Rumbaut & Portes 2001).

### **Academic Challenges**

No matter how the statistics are framed, the enormous numbers are accompanied by matching problems. The Harvard study, for example, shows a decline in academic achievement for immigrant children and youth between the ages of nine and fourteen from China, Central America, Haiti, Mexico, and the Dominican Republic during the five years researchers studied the same sample of students. For high school-aged immigrant students, the academic challenges are deeper. Though they only comprise 8 percent of the U.S. high school population, foreign-born high school students account for nearly 25 percent of the U.S. high school dropouts (Fry 2005).

There are well-documented reasons for the academic listlessness. Some children come to school without being proficient in their native language, let alone English. And teaching immigrant students both English and content areas remains a challenge. Although much, though not all, of the edge in the argument over bilingual education has ebbed in recent years, if for no other reason than because it is required by federal law and arguing about it is largely moot, this does not mean that all bilingual programs are well designed or engage the best teachers. Nor, as Samuel G. Freedman (2007) reported in the *New York Times*, does it mean that there are enough seats for immigrant students who need bilingual programs.

**Brentwood:  
Despite Problems, Success**

Despite these challenges, there are some success stories. San Antonio's Brentwood is an example of how a school with socio-economic data working against it can, in fact, succeed, even if it requires teacher Ericka Olivares to put on a linguistic gymnastics show every day and even if the success comes in tiny steps.

Some of the students in her eighth-grade social studies class are immigrant students for whom English is a second language. Other students are American born, but English is not the dominant home language. Then there are the students who can speak English fluently. Some of these students also speak impeccable Spanish. The class is studying pre-Civil War America, and Ms. Olivares, young and energetic, delivers the lesson in English to Spanish to English, as she moves about the room inspecting her students' work.

One boy, a Spanish-speaker, is stuck on a worksheet about Eli Whitney's cotton gin. In his language, Ms. Olivares coaxes him. He's still unable to produce the answer for himself until a deskmate leans over and, speaking in Spanish, reminds him what Ms. Olivares told the class a few minutes earlier about Whitney. "You were listening!" she beams. "Muy bien."

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Some children come to school without being proficient in their native language, let alone English. And teaching immigrant students both English and content areas remains a challenge.

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At the end of her class, as her students get ready for the lunch hour, she acknowledges that it is not easy teaching children with different language needs and language skills at different levels, and she's mindful that she has to keep the lesson moving at a good clip to keep everyone engaged. "It is," she says, "a challenge."

Her students do not disagree. One tall, thin boy doesn't speak Spanish and admits that it's difficult to follow Ms. Olivares when she does speak Spanish for the classmate who sits in front of him. Of her twenty-eight social studies students, about half require English instruction, the teacher says, either because they are immigrants or because the dominant language at home is not English.

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“I think immigrant kids have an appreciation for and value education more than our kids who live in the U.S., especially recent immigrants because they know the struggle of everyday life of living in poverty in Mexico.”

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### **English-Acquisition Models**

There are a variety of English-acquisition models in use today in the nation’s schools, but researchers and teachers have long known that English learners absorb English faster if their native language is fully developed. In accordance with the blueprint used by Brentwood, as these students are learning English, they are taught core subjects like math, history, and science in their native tongue, eventually moving to all-English instruction by their third year.

Brentwood’s approach has its critics, some of whom say the most effective way to teach English learners is by immersing them in English, entirely abandoning instruction in the native language. Other school systems use the English as a Second Language model, which may also include immersion but can also extend assistance in the student’s native language. And so-called dual bilingual education programs attempt to make learners fluent in both languages.

But the research that strikes the strongest chord among many educators, backed by anecdotal evidence in classrooms like Ms. Olivares’s eighth-grade class at Brentwood, indicates that the most effective way to teach

English-limited students is by teaching them to read in both English and in their native tongue over the same time period, but at different times during the school day, according to Johns Hopkins researchers who studied the issue and reviewed three decades of studies scrutinizing English-language acquisition school programs (Edweek.org, nd; Slavin & Cheung 2003).

### **Parent Engagement**

Principal Cordova is well aware that the world in which he grew up has rapidly changed, making his students’ journey much more of a challenge. But the youthful-looking principal also knows firsthand what several studies over the years have suggested: “I think immigrant kids have an appreciation for and value education more than our kids who live in the U.S., especially recent immigrants because they know the struggle of everyday life of living in poverty in Mexico,” says Cordova, who adds that his mother would remind him of the sacrifices she made so that he could have more opportunities (Rivera-Batiz 1997).

Immigrant parents also encourage their children, he says, knowing that free public education in America is one of the reasons many families risk their lives to enter the country illegally. Though immigrant parental involvement is spotty to nonexistent across the country because of deportation fears, on San Antonio's West Side, parents do participate at high levels at Brentwood. This may be one of the few times – perhaps the only time – when segregation actually benefits a school community because it's difficult to discern immigrants from Mexican Americans living in the sprawling working-class neighborhoods of bungalows and frame homes.

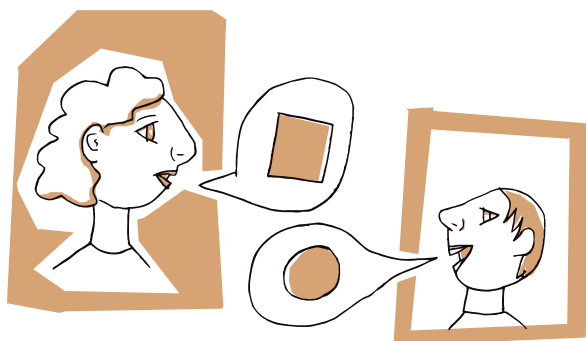
### **Using the Courts to Address Inequitable Funding**

Brentwood's school district, the Edgewood Independent School District, an urban school system that encompasses 14.03 square miles, is significant in the national story for quality schools and quality programs for immigrants. In a 1973 U.S. Supreme Court case, *San Antonio Independent School District v. Rodriguez*, Edgewood challenged the state of Texas over inequities in school funding, arguing that the state department of education discriminated against school systems like Edgewood and that poor schools should receive more aid to educate *all* their students, including the immigrant children and youth who do not speak English. The Supreme Court ruled against the Edgewood district in the case, asserting that the funding inequities did not violate the U.S. Constitution's guarantee of equal protection; this ruling was interpreted to suggest that funding inequities needed to be addressed at the state level.

Yet even this defeat turned out ultimately victorious. Parents from



Edgewood who were, themselves, immigrants or first-generation Americans filed suit in state court and helped engender reform of school-aid formulas to reflect special-needs students like immigrants. Subsequent rulings from the U.S. Supreme Court also helped ensure that schools provide greater consideration to children of immigrants. In 1974, the year after *Rodriguez*, the Court, in *Lau v. Nichols*, established the right of English-learning children to be taught in their own language while they learned English. And in a 1982 case from Texas, *Plyler v. Doe*, the Court struck down a Texas law that allowed school districts to bar the children of illegal immigrants from enrolling in public schools.



### ***Misconceptions about the Schooling of “Old” Immigrants***

These court rulings, and the record of school and classroom practices in recent years, suggests that, as difficult as it may seem today, immigrant children at the turn of the twentieth century entered schools that were considerably less sensitive to their needs. “Children were thrown into classes where they were expected to learn English by osmosis; no one had ever heard of ‘English as a second language’ or ‘bilingual education,’” the author Susan Jacoby (1974) wrote three decades ago in one of the first pieces that chronicled the beginning of the modern immigrant movement.

Everyone went to neighborhood elementary schools, and many youngsters – especially immigrants – attended schools that were as ethnically segregated as today’s schools are racially segregated. Jews who packed the schools on Manhattan’s Lower East Side learned English not through contact with native-born American classmates, but because English was the only language their teachers spoke in class.

In her essay, Jacoby compared the public schools that a young Gustavo Cordova, the Brentwood principal, would have attended to schools immigrants at the turn of the last century would have attended. “It was a sink-or-swim situation,” Marie Syrkin, who attended New York public schools when she was a new immigrant herself and taught other immigrant students between 1925 and 1948, told Jacoby. The daughter of Russian Jewish immigrants, Syrkin says it is “nonsensical”

to give the schools major credit for the success of some immigrant groups.

The immigrants who did well in school were strongly motivated to succeed in that way. In the case of the Jews, it's a cliché that there was a strong emphasis on the value of education in the homes. Of course, the schools were there to be taken advantage of if you were able to do it – that was the big difference between America and the old country. But the fact is that most immigrant children didn't succeed in school at all. There was no such thing as remedial reading to help children who didn't catch on quickly. The teachers were not as well educated as they are today. Students didn't have access to paperback books the way they do now. So when people say, "Why can't the schools do for the blacks what they did for the immigrants?" I laugh. They should be transported in a time machine to a school on the Lower East Side in 1910, and see a bewildered child who knows only Yiddish or Russian listening to an Irish teacher talk about the Revolutionary War in English. The schools are trying much harder to accommodate differences today than they did when I was a student. (Jacoby 1974)

### ***More Challenges Ahead***

There is strong evidence to support Syrkin's viewpoint, Jacoby writes. The Jews and Chinese were the only "old" immigrants who made effective use of education in the first and second generations, she suggests. Most other immigrant groups concentrated on finding work and did not begin to take schooling seriously until their third and fourth generations in the United States – when education became closely related to job opportunities (Jacoby 1974). That tie is even more important today, a reality finally being

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**As difficult as it may seem today, immigrant children at the turn of the twentieth century entered schools that were considerably less sensitive to their needs.**

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recognized in the first decade of the twenty-first century by other leaders besides educators.

In summer 2006, for example, then-governor Mitt Romney of Massachusetts, now a Republican presidential candidate, asserted that the U.S. could not afford to shut the door to all immigration, as Congress did in the 1920s with a series of draconian laws that severely limited immigration. Instead, Romney suggested in a speech to California Republicans, skilled immigrants should be aggressively courted.

But views like Romney's are often drowned out by a growing anti-immigrant chorus, which includes some one-time allies of immigrants. Former U.S. Representative Herman Badillo of New York, the first Puerto Rican elected to Congress, generated a maelstrom of protest in late 2006 when he suggested in his book *One Nation, One Standard: An Ex-Liberal on How Hispanics Can Succeed Just Like Other Immigrant Groups* that Hispanics do not value education the way other minority and racial groups do, principally Asian Americans. The former congressman's stance triggered a torrent of controversy and a backlash in Latino publications and Web sites; the debate rehashed many of the same pro and con arguments about bilingual education and assimilation. (Cortes 2006)

In such a climate, the offering of more services for immigrant students is unlikely. While elementary through middle-school students are covered by U.S. law, there are no such federal mandates to cover high school students; under federal law, public schools are only required to offer bilingual education through the sixth grade. The result has been an uneven patchwork of offerings for secondary students that often are weaker versions of K–6 curricula (Rumbaut & Portes 2001).

Principal Cordova isn't worried about how the rhetoric will impact his students, who, after all, live in a protective cocoon of a neighborhood in a city long comfortable with its immigrant roots and ties. But,

they will have more challenges than I did. I don't see problems as long we have them [in Brentwood]. But they will encounter the stereotyping in the educational and corporate worlds. After college, that's where they'll face the challenges.

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# Stories of War and Schooling: The Children Left Behind

Alina Newman

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*Children who come from war-torn and impoverished areas of Central America and the Caribbean often bring with them backgrounds that schools seldom acknowledge or take into account.*

**J**oan DiBono was not particularly thrilled during the fall of 1991. Our suburban school district, already overwhelmed with students, was forced to create new classrooms in order to accommodate a growing surge of immigrants. The principal was counting on Joan to “bite the bullet,” give up her treasured seniority in third grade, and teach one of the newly formed first grades. When she brought Alberto to my ESL room on that late September morning, Joan did not look happy, and neither did her frightened charge.

“MRS. NEWMAN.” Her eyes glittered with rage. “I would like you to meet Al-ber-to? He’s just arrived from El Salvador and speaks no English?” Her hand rested on a little boy’s shoulders. “Al-ber-to can’t hold a pencil. Al-ber-to stuck his hand in my fish tank. I don’t think he’s ever been in a school building before. Could you have a happy little talk with him about acceptable classroom behavior?”

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## **A New Challenge for All Teachers**

Joan faced a pedagogical challenge that most mainstream monolingual educators in suburbia were unprepared to handle. The acculturation of immigrant children was, until recently, considered almost exclusively to be the responsibility of the English as a second language (ESL) teacher. Poor Alberto had escaped a bloody civil war only to get caught in a political, pedagogical, and racial rip-tide that threatened to drag him under. My job was to help him swim to shore, and *quickly*.

Thus began my sixteen-year career as a bilingual ESL teacher in Long Island, New York. Hundreds of second-language learners have crossed the threshold of my ESL classroom since 1990, survivors of senseless violence or desperate poverty. Salvadorans sought safety and freedom from civil war; Guatemalans fled political turmoil and genocide; Dominicans sought a brighter economic future. Families continue to seek the promise of America with little more than a burning desire to survive and erase the political madness or hardships left behind.

## ***Struggling Children, Heart-Wrenching Stories***

For these folks, there is no definitive processing center like Ellis Island, but an undetermined borderland that separates aliens from those who hold power; an emotional border crossed with struggle that “has always been inner, and is played out in the outer terrains” (Anzaldúa 1987, p. 109).

Paulo Freire wrote that true teaching comes from a common ground based on respect, humility, and mutual admiration. Thus, I am increasingly conscious of my outward behavior, knowing full well that perceptions can cause even the most dedicated to make wrong assumptions about people whose lives they do not understand.

### **Alberto**

In time, we learned Alberto’s story. His stick drawings and rectangles depicted a house on stilts. Lollipop shapes represented people; his triangles, volcanoes. Alberto’s mother disappeared when he was just two, possibly raped or murdered by police or masked leftist guerrillas. His father fled to New York and found work in a window factory. For



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the next four years, Alberto's grandmother raised him in a shack perched near a ravine and managed by doing laundry or cooking for farm laborers. The boy knew no electricity, no running water, no schools or nearby stores. His discourse was the rural language of flora and fauna, natural cycles, local foods, and the violence of war. His Spanish verbal skills seemed quite limited for his age.

Trouble followed Alberto everywhere. He often walked out of his classroom without permission, clogged up the art classroom's sink, brandished used and dripping paintbrushes like swords, fed crayons into the electric sharpener, and urinated openly on the playground's bushes during recess. He enjoyed stuffing entire rolls of tissue paper into the toilet, flooding the boys' bathroom daily and creating rivers of havoc in the hallway. He played roughly with children and filched their supplies. By late October, most teachers suspected that Alberto was retarded.

### **Carlos and Judit**

Nine-year-old Carlos never spoke about his life in El Salvador. When questioned, he smiled shyly or shrugged. One day, I asked the children to create a family tree and dedicate leaves to their relatives. Carlos fled the room, crying inconsolably. Eventually, he shared a heart-wrenching story through a mess of tears and sobs. Apparently, Carlos and his grandfather were walking down a dirt road towards the nearest town, and Carlos skipped ahead, as little boys will do. When a series of loud shots rang out, Carlos spun around and discovered that his grandpa's head had been blown off. He described how the headless body stumbled several steps before collapsing.

Scenes like this are the stuff of Hollywood or Nintendo to most North American children. To Carlos, they were real.

Judit was a bright, beautiful, and bubbly eight-year-old who'd spent months trekking through three countries to reach her mother's waiting arms across the Rio Grande. Her excitement on school registration day was contagious. However, four months later, she lost interest in everything and seemed very distracted. The light in her sparkling eyes was gone. At a teacher-parent conference, we learned that an itinerant laborer who rented a bed in their attic had raped Judit while her mother worked. Fearing deportation, Judit's mother did not report the rape to authorities.

Judit had survived a brutal war and a perilous crossing, only to lose faith in what she had considered the land of hope and freedom.



**José, Geobany, Hernán, and Michel**  
José sailed from the Dominican Republic to Puerto Rico across the perilous Mona Passage with his mother and two older siblings, eventually settling in Long Island. José experienced difficulties with school tasks immediately because no one at home could read or write, and bilingual assessments were scarce. He struggled through high school and never graduated. Instead, José joined a gang and shot two rivals. He is presently in a county jail, his future dismal and uncertain.

Geobany, the son of a young, illiterate Salvadoran couple, attended our schools until tenth grade. His behavioral and learning problems were attributed to multiple learning disabilities. Eventually, he joined a criminal Salvadoran gang. Unable to manage family crises, his father left home. Thirteen years after her arrival, Geobany's mother struggles with personal and financial dilemmas in a language she hardly understands and with institutional literacies she cannot manage.

Hernán came from Guatemala at the age of seven, learned English quickly, and was well on his way to becoming a success story. Today, he is nineteen

and awaits trial for murdering a salesman. What happened to this boy's promise? Why did he turn to crime? At what point is the language barrier an excuse for social institutions to overlook any dysfunction?

Nine-year-old Michel is one of my recent challenges. He arrived a year ago from Haiti, an unschooled and undisciplined waif with street smarts and little else. None but our Haitian security guard could communicate with him. An older, Americanized cousin treated him with disdain and ignored his presence. During regular class time Michel fidgeted, copied strings of illegible letters, took long walks, or hid in the bathroom. He has finally learned to understand English and functions academically at a first-grade level.

New regulations forced Michel to take a rigorous English language arts state assessment in early January. He failed it, of course. *Newsday* will soon publish test results. Lawmakers, realtors, and anti-tax squawkers who have never taught kids like Michel will judge our monumental efforts as incompetent.

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## ***Understanding Immigrant Families' Worlds through Inquiry and Storytelling***

Immigrants are expected to thrive in an alien environment for which there may have been little scaffolding. They must mediate tools and need to assimilate or ascribe meaning to this brave new world through nurturing and informative social interventions. Unfamiliar institutions they must deal with on a daily basis allow no time to reorganize and internalize mental functions such as the effective manipulation of new objects, the development of perception of unknown physical entities, and attention to unknown languages. Newcomers need time to unite elements of past experience with a present alien world and to internalize higher psychological functions such as those required by school and other institutions (Vygotsky 1978).

Children like Alberto, Carlos, or Michel cannot be assessed in the same manner as urban or middle-class Anglo contemporaries because their thought development and linguistic abilities are constructs of the physical and social worlds that surrounded them for the first years of their lives. Their actions are misjudged as representative of limited intelligence, learning disability, or behavioral dysfunction. Adequate yearly progress should be holistic and humane; instead, it is a mere percentile.

In order for me to adopt a stance of advocacy towards immigrant families, I needed to penetrate their worlds. As a doctoral student, I began to record their life experiences by gaining access into homes and places of worship. By

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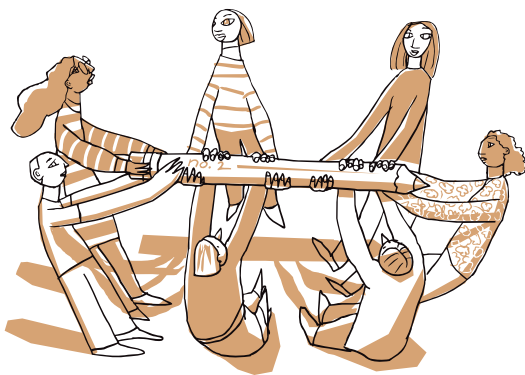
**Actions of children like Alberto, Carlos, or Michel are misjudged as representative of limited intelligence, learning disability, or behavioral dysfunction. Adequate yearly progress should be holistic and humane; instead, it is a mere percentile.**

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combining a narrative analysis of interviews along with my own, I highlighted not just the common threads, but also the tensions of understanding their worldviews. My purpose was to present my transformational process as educator through the work I conducted with immigrants.

### **Luis, Patricia, and Isabel**

Luis, a Costa Rican day laborer, shared a bedroom on the second floor of a private house with his pregnant wife and two sons. Living space contained a two-tiered bunk bed, a portable TV set atop an old refrigerator, a small table with two chairs, an electric cook-top appliance with two burners, a coffee pot, and a storage closet. Our conversation often turned to schooling. The couple described a substandard public education in a poor, hilly Costa Rican neighborhood. School supplies were scarce and most days were spent copy-



ing from an old chalkboard. Luis recalled beatings from poorly paid or trained teachers; overcrowded and boring classes; few materials shared by many. Most classmates left school by sixth or seventh grade to join the ranks of the working class.

Luis and Patricia were thrilled with their seven-year-old's bilingual program because they could help with homework. However, English assignments posed dilemmas for them:

For all of us . . . shall we say . . . we think in Spanish . . . For instance, if the horse is white, in English the words are in a different order . . . "white horse." . . . Nothing is clear . . . We think in Spanish and we tell our son, "write it this way!" and of course, the teacher marks it wrong. Look up "doll" in a bilingual dictionary and it says *muñeca*, which in Spanish means "wrist!" Your hair could stand on end!

Free ESL lessons were offered at the public library, but Patricia feared pushing her toddler's stroller through a mile of ice and snow.

An office cleaner named Isabel described a tough life in an extremely remote and mountainous region of central Dominican Republic. She was a barefoot child who fetched spring water, picked coffee, gathered firewood, and attended school sporadically. She recalled a weak, battery-powered radio, no television, and traveling priests who performed outdoor baptisms or weddings.

As the mother of three school-age children, Isabel believed that Hispanics had no voice in education policy or school decisions because PTA and school board meetings were held in English, and translations were sporadic. To her, this was a very succinct message that her input was not wanted. Isabel did not participate in school affairs because she felt excluded from infor-

mational sessions that she did not understand. Immigrants like Isabel, Patricia, or Luis feel inadequate as they confront daunting challenges such as the inability to help their children, attend meetings or workshops, fill out questionnaires, or learn the rationale behind mandated school policies.

### **Maria and Delmy**

As a child in Usulután, El Salvador, María lived with her family in a one-room cottage within her father's employer's coffee plantation. Her schooling was interrupted for months at a time during coffee harvest, until, finally, she quit seventh grade. Her life took a sudden and tragic turn during the early 1980s after a violent earthquake destroyed her village. Already a young mother of two, Maria became a live-in domestic in the capital city of San Salvador at the same time that country's civil war broke out and travel became extremely dangerous. One weekend, several armed and hooded men forced her and other passengers off the bus to Usulután. The men gang-raped, beat, and abandoned María, threatening to kill her mother and children if she notified anyone. To protect her family, Maria paid her life's savings to a *coyote* and spent weeks crossing Guatemala and Mexico into Texas. There, she fell into the hands of an unscrupulous lawyer who enslaved her as an underpaid domestic for a whole year, while promising to process her residency status.

Maria's story of survival through weeks of dangerous crossings and near starvation mirrored those of many compatriots who preferred silence rather than risk deportation. Delmy

ate lunch outdoors with several classmates during a break between classes at her San Salvador University campus. Disturbed by their chatter, a young man moved over to another picnic table. Suddenly, a carload of armed guerrillas drove by and fired shots into the campus, killing the young man just feet from Delmy and her friends. A week later militias seeking Delmy and her brother for questioning raided their house. Terrified, Delmy decided that El Salvador was too dangerous; she quit her studies, headed north, and swore never to return.

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Immigrants like Isabel, Patricia, or Luis feel inadequate as they confront daunting challenges such as the inability to help their children or learn the rationale behind mandated school policies.

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### ***Assessment, No Child Left Behind, and Human Success Stories***

Long Island school districts' awareness of immigrants' linguistic, sociological, and psychological needs has steadily improved. Still, there is plenty of room for increased sensitivity among teachers who stem from primarily monolingual, Caucasian, middle-class backgrounds (Nieto 2000). Teacher-education programs must provide students with more courses that deal with issues of diversity and the challenges of today's changing suburban classrooms.

Despite increased awareness of the disproportionate number of ethnic-minority children referred to special





education, the No Child Left Behind Act and its stress on “scientifically measurable” assessments have undone decades of sound research in the field of second-language acquisition. Immigrants are a politically marked subgroup blamed for failing test scores, which are aired like stained laundry for all to see. Adequate yearly progress (AYP) is a yardstick for government funding, publishing interests, or real estate concerns.

Nowhere does AYP depict human success stories – *pupusa* restaurants, Dominican bodegas, beauty shops, construction or landscaping concerns – that proliferate yearly. Ignored by the media are first-generation newcomers who manage to learn English despite all odds or the countless relatives that are fed, clothed, or housed through hard-earned dollars and backbreaking labor.

Newcomers continue to reach our schools from all parts of the world, longing to fulfill America’s promise. Our school welcomes homeless children, refugees from persecution, parents

who cannot read, speakers of other languages. Are social institutions acknowledging them or leaving them behind? Who defends their civil rights? Will our school system readjust or continue to brand them as failing subgroups? It is my hope that suburban communities such as Long Island learn to rejoice in ethnic diversity and coordinate local agencies to create a gentler, brighter future for *all* of our children.

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# What Do We Mean by “Quality Instruction” for Adolescent English-Language Learners?

Margarita Calderón

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*A program that has been successful in improving adolescents’ English skills suggests principles for teaching high school–aged English-language learners.*

The nation’s secondary schools have become increasingly concerned with the need to reduce dropout rates and improve all students’ academic achievement. Closing the academic achievement gap between minority students and White students is also a requirement of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) law. While this law continues to be debated and its lack of funding has made it highly controversial, NCLB has actually brought more attention to language-minority students. Schools must demonstrate that they are achieving adequate yearly progress with English-language learners (ELLs) in order to avoid sanctions.

This attention to language-minority students has also generated more studies. Surveys conducted by Public Agenda focused on the differences between White students and language-minority students and their parents (Johnson, Arumi & Ott 2006). Their surveys showed repeated and significant disparities between the educational experiences of minority students and their parents compared

with those of White students. Minority students were more likely to report widespread academic shortfalls, low standards, and unsettled schools due to lax discipline, causing serious levels of unrest and distraction in their schools. The major concern, however, were the low levels of academic achievement and high dropout rates.

## ***The Need to Change Instruction for Language-Minority Students***

Two national panels have recently published extensive reviews of the literature on language-minority students and on ELLs in particular: the National Literacy Panel for Language Minority Children and Youth (August & Shanahan 2006), and Carnegie Corporation of New York’s panel on adolescent English-language learners (Short & Fitzsimmons 2006), on which I served. These reviews revealed the magnitude of the national challenge:

- Seventy percent of all students in the nation entering the fifth and ninth grades in 2005 are reading below grade level (NCES 2005).
- Both dropouts and high school graduates are demonstrating significantly worse reading skills than ten years ago (NCES 2005).

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Teacher-preparation programs need to face today's reality – all teachers in middle and high schools are now teachers of reading and ESL in addition to their subject matter.

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- Eighty-nine percent of Hispanic and 86 percent of African American middle and high school students read below grade level (NCES 2005).
- Only 4 percent of eighth-grade ELLs and 20 percent of students classified as “formerly ELL” scored at the proficient or advanced levels on the reading portion of the 2005 National Assessment of Educational Progress (Short & Fitzsimmons 2006).

From these and other national reports and studies a consensus is emerging – instruction in middle and high schools needs to change drastically. Change in quality teaching has become indispensable. Changes need to start at the teacher-preparation level – at the universities, the alternative credentialing programs, and in-service professional development practices in school districts.

### ***Integrating Reading and Language Pedagogy with Content Knowledge***

One of the major changes proposed in this article is the integration of second-language reading pedagogy across the math, science, and social studies disciplines (Calderón 2007). As our preliminary studies indicate, a second-language approach to reading helps not only ELLs, but also any student reading below grade level in middle and high schools.

However, teachers of science, social studies, and math do not typically receive preparation in reading and second-language development. Teachers of English as a second language (ESL) do not typically study reading, nor do they specialize in a content area such as science. Teachers of reading learn about phonics but not linguistics or second-language instruction. Teacher-preparation programs need to face today's reality – all teachers in middle and high schools are now teachers of reading and ESL in addition to their subject matter.

School- and district-level in-service programs also need to be revamped to combine all these disciplines. The trend to have one workshop for ESL teachers, a different one for teachers in each content area, others for reading teachers, and so forth, perpetuates the fragmentation of teacher knowledge and practice.

## ***A New Professional Development Model***

In response to the heavy demand for literacy programs that address a diversity of student needs, Carnegie Corporation of New York sponsored Expediting Comprehension for English Language Learners (ExC-ELL), a five-year study launched in 2003 (Calderón 2007). The purpose of the project was to develop and study the effects of a professional development model for middle and high school teachers of English, science, mathematics, and social studies who work with ELLs. A pilot phase has been completed and the formal study is being conducted in New York City schools (Calderón 2007, 2006).

Since most ELLs are in heterogeneous classrooms that include English-only students, the staff development program is designed to help teachers provide effective instruction for ELLs and all other students in their classrooms, particularly those reading below grade level and needing extensive vocabulary development for comprehending subject-matter texts.

The professional development also includes a specific strand for literacy coaches, content-curriculum specialists, principals, and central office administrators on how to observe and coach teachers as they deliver their lessons, integrating reading, writing, and vocabulary development along with their content.

An ExC-ELL Observation Protocol (EOP) was developed and is being tested as a classroom tool for:

- planning content lessons
- observing student performance
- coaching by literacy coaches not familiar with ELL instruction
- supervision by administrators
- teacher self-reflection
- peer coaching
- conducting classroom research



The EOP employs the use of digital pens and digital paper forms. Users fill in the form as they would any other paper-and-pencil-based observational instrument. But the digital pen captures all observational data. Upon completion of an observational protocol, the information captured by the digital pen is transferred into a computer and the software produces charts and graphs of student and teacher progress during the year.

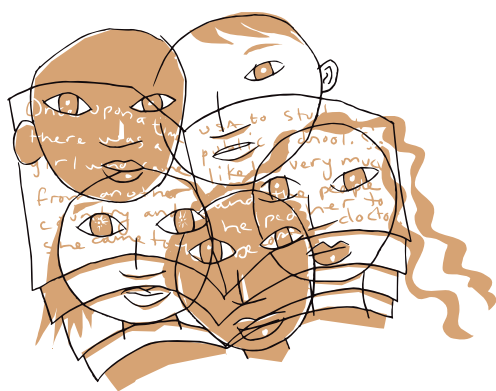
The software automatically extracts the collected information and generates a “wrapped” data file. Through this process, we are able to capture and report data through pie charts, time intervals of progress, and graph outcomes for teachers and students participating in the project.

### **Research Base**

Although most of the studies on reading have focused on early reading at the elementary levels, these have been a strong foundation for testing our programs for middle and high school ELLs

who may or may not have literacy skills in their primary language. The Bilingual Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition program (Calderón, Hertz-Lazarowitz & Slavin 1998), the Transitional Program (Calderón et al. 2005), the Success for All/Éxito Para Todos program (Slavin & Madden 2001), the Two-Way Bilingual program (Calderón & Minaya-Rowe 2003), and the vocabulary study (Calderón et al. 2005) were the foundation for the instructional framework of the ExC-ELL program.

The professional development design and many of the activities for improving both the knowledge base and the instructional practices of teachers were grounded in research on reading in general and on adolescent literacy in particular (Snow, Burns & Griffin 1998; National Reading Panel 2000; Snow, Griffin & Burns 2005; Biancarosa & Snow 2004).



## Key Features

The ExC-ELL professional development model's key features are designed to prepare teachers and tutors in reading/language arts, ESL, and disciplines such as science and history to meet the needs of a diverse set of second-language students.

### EXTENSIVE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ON READING COMPREHENSION AND VOCABULARY DEVELOPMENT FOR CONTENT, ESL, AND BILINGUAL TEACHERS

ExC-ELL prepares all teachers in a school to provide direct and explicit vocabulary and reading comprehension instruction. This instruction in comprehension is critical because as students progress through school, they are required to comprehend more and more complicated texts.

It is not enough to leave oracy and literacy development to ESL teachers. It is impossible for ESL or dual-language teachers to add domain knowledge on top of oral, reading, and writing proficiency. The type of reading and writing that students need in middle and high schools can be effectively taught by content teachers when they embed vocabulary, reading, and writing skills specific to their discipline. The strategies typically used in ESL classrooms or by reading tutors are not necessarily the same as the strategies students need for reading a biology text, a mathematics word problem, or historical documents. Therefore, it is critically important that all teachers in a school with ELL populations participate in professional development programs that are specific to their instructional goals and curriculum demands, but that integrate second-language literacy (Calderón 2007).

#### COMPREHENSIVE INTERVENTIONS TO ADDRESS THE DIVERSITY OF ELLs

Effective oracy and literacy programs call for a comprehensive sequential set of interventions that address the diversity of ELL students who come into secondary schools. The ELL population is very diverse, both in background and academic achievement. We found students reading at first- through sixth-grade levels, but their proficiency in vocabulary and in English discourse might vary widely; an ELL reading at a second-grade level might be an advanced speaker of English, while one testing at a sixth-grade reading level may have a beginner's oral proficiency.

Some students, often those with high oracy and low literacy, have been in U.S. schools for five or more years. Others are newcomers who have a high academic background and can comprehend high school texts but cannot express themselves. Still other newcomers are what the New York City Department of Education has identified as Students with Interrupted Formal Education (SIFE): those who may have only been to school for two or three years in their home country. Their primary-language literacy skills need to be enhanced in order for these skills to accelerate transfer into English. Perhaps the most daunting group are students who have attended U.S. schools all their lives but are still limited English proficient! What was happening – or not happening – in the schools which did not address their literacy and academic needs?

To meet these diverse needs, ExC-ELL expanded into three programs that complement each other. ESL, language arts, dual-language, and reading teachers, tutors, and mainstream content teachers team up in each school to provide a more comprehensive intervention. The beginning literacy inter-

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The type of reading and writing that students need in middle and high schools can be effectively taught by content teachers when they embed vocabulary, reading, and writing skills specific to their discipline.

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ventions are called RIGOR (Reading Instructional Goals for Older Readers) Levels 1 and 2. The components focus on phonemic and phonological awareness, decoding, word knowledge, reading fluency and comprehension, and beginning writing mechanics and composition. These are taught by ESL teachers, dual-language teachers, tutors, or reading specialists. The curriculum and professional development for levels 1 and 2 are also in Spanish, since there are a growing number of dual-language programs in secondary schools.

RIGOR Level 3, or ExC-ELL, is for either English or Spanish social studies, science, math, and language arts teachers who have ELLs or SIFEs in their classrooms. The lessons and professional development consist of ten key elements: parsing texts and integrating standards; background building; selecting vocabulary for the different levels; teaching vocabulary before, during, and after reading; teacher think-alouds for metacognition; teaching, monitoring and assessing reading comprehension skills; discourse development and practice; writing skills development for content genre; assessment and assessment tools and use of the EOP; and teachers' learning communities.

### **Modeling and Practicing Instructional Activities**

The ExC-ELL professional development institutes nest the oracy and literacy activities into cooperative learning in order to model for teachers how to orchestrate the instructional activities in their classroom. In teams of four, teachers practice the basic elements such as: listening comprehension through think-alouds, story or textbook structure analysis, vocabulary building, partner reading, descriptions retell, spelling, grammar, story-related writing, and peer assessments. We have found that the more opportunity teachers and students have for interaction and practice, the better they anchor their knowledge.

Teachers learn to use the writing process for a variety of expository and narrative writing genres across the content areas. Special emphasis is given to the editing stage and the mechanics of writing where the features of ELL writing are highlighted, as well as the types of approaches to writing by students from different cultures, and the most frequent ELL miscues. The institutes in Spanish review grammar, accents, spelling, and other conventions for teachers. Teachers do their own creative writing and are guided through the writing process in order to experi-

ence each step, take mini-lessons on mechanics, and learn final polished publication formats. Teachers also learn writing strategies that simultaneously increase content understanding and improve reading and writing skills such as: problem-solution-effect; summarizing; comparing and contrasting; outlining; and other comprehension skills for content-based reading.

### **Transferring Learning into Teachers' Classrooms**

At the institutes, teachers practice using the EOP to develop their lessons. We also work with teachers in their classrooms or in their colleagues' classrooms on how to observe and document student progress with the protocol. During reflection and coaching time, teachers gauge how student progress correlates with their own implementation progress and student outcomes.

As the monthly waves of data from student tests and classroom observations come in, these programs continue to be refined. Using independent levels of analysis for teacher and student development, as well as a combined analysis through the EOP, is giving us a glance at the support teachers need to transfer new knowledge and practice into the classroom and at how this impacts student learning. In particular, it highlights areas we need to strengthen in the professional development designs.

### ***What Is "Quality Instruction" for Adolescent ELLs?***

Our experience with ExC-ELL has suggested some lessons about what works. The following are principles for quality instruction for adolescent ELLs that we have derived from our work.

- The key elements of reading development (e.g., phonological knowledge, fluency, vocabulary,

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The traditional instruction in secondary schools only works for about the top 15 percent of mainstream students in any classroom. The essence is to teach to 100 percent of the class.

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comprehension) are basically the same for mainstream students reading below grade level and ELLs in secondary schools. The instructional strategies used for ELLs work just as well with mainstream and special education students. However, the traditional instruction in secondary schools (e.g., teacher lecture, student independent reading, followed by answering questions individually or in groups, then quiz) only works for about the top 15 percent of mainstream students in any classroom. The essence is to teach to 100 percent of the class, not just 15 percent, by integrating the elements described above.

- English-language learners should have opportunities every day to learn and practice – in each subject-area classroom – new words, targeted comprehension strategies with each content text, and relevant writing (e.g., formulating math problems, summaries of historical events, science processes, main character analysis).
- When all language arts, ESL, special education, and content teachers in a school work together, more students achieve. ESL teachers, reading specialists, and tutors need to work in tandem with content teachers to accelerate the learning and application of the new words and reading and writing strategies.
- Currently, most teachers of science, math, and social studies are not prepared to teach oracy and literacy integrated with their subject matter. Therefore, intensive continuous professional development programs need to be offered to help teachers adapt new learning into their teaching styles and transfer that learning into their classroom.

## School Climate



The professional development designs should also demonstrate and provide tools for gauging how their new teaching styles correlate with student progress and impact. Measuring student progress alone does not create effective instructional practices; what produces learning is the correlation between teacher and student progress and the time for teachers to reflect on this information and adjust their approaches to learning and teaching.

- Professional development, coaching support systems, and reflection-time components also need to focus on classroom management and classroom climate. If parents of minority students and the students themselves are reporting “widespread academic shortfalls, low standards, and unsettled schools due to lax discipline causing serious levels of unrest and distraction in their schools” (Johnson, Arumi & Ott 2006), this is the obvious first item to address as schools begin to remedy academic failure.

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# Making High School Work and Changing the World for Immigrant Students: The SEIS Approach

Lorna Fast Buffalo Horse

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*By recognizing the unique assets immigrant children possess, a troubled high school in Portland, Oregon, has been able to turn itself around.*

**E**ight years ago, when I first came to work at Roosevelt High School in Portland, Oregon, students and staff alike cued me in to the internal nickname for the school: Loser-velt. Failure was internalized at multiple levels with low test scores, high dropout rates, and pernicious discipline problems. Roosevelt was at a turning point, as federal School-to-Work money was drying up and a premier career program was starting to fade with the lost funding.

The other issue that was knocking at Roosevelt's door during the same period was a change in student demographics. Roosevelt had long been a school with higher-than-average poverty and a racially and ethnically diverse population. What was new was that the Latino population alone was increasing significantly. The school was changing from a diverse student body with large numbers of White working-class, African American, Hmong, Vietnamese, Russian, and smaller numbers of Latino students to one in which Latino students were rivaling all other groups.

Latino students enrolling at Roosevelt since 1999 have tended to be newer immigrants with little or no English-language proficiency. These students had an average prior schooling level of just over six years, and several entered school as unaccompanied minors – teenagers who worked and lived with friends or siblings and whose parents not only did not live with them, but depended upon them to send support home to Mexico or Guatemala. To add to all of these challenges, many of these students came to us as undocumented immigrants – students with few prospects for legal employment and virtually no chance of receiving federal financial aid or even many private scholarships to attend post-secondary education.

The Roosevelt population change meant that staff had much to learn about language acquisition, sheltered teaching protocols, and ways to motivate and inspire students who could easily and understandably slip into hopelessness. Many students escaped pessimism, though; two contagiously hopeful ones are described here. We will start with the story of Flor.<sup>1</sup>

*Lorna Fast Buffalo Horse is principal of the Spanish-English International School on the Roosevelt Campus in Portland, Oregon.*

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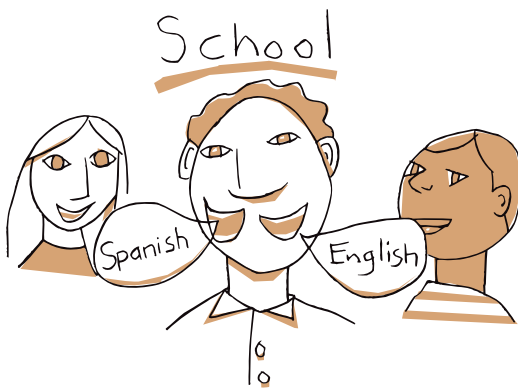
<sup>1</sup> Student names have been changed for this article.

### ***Flor: Dashed Hopes for an Exceptional Student***

Flor was born in Guatemala during that country's civil war. Her parents made the difficult decision to leave her with her grandparents there and seek political asylum in the United States. After two years, with asylum secured, they arranged to have their daughter sent to them in Oregon. Flor enrolled in school and the family settled in to a new life. More children were born and the parents became certified as foster parents who took in countless foster children. Life was good in many ways, but they still needed to resolve Flor's immigration status. They sought legal counsel, paid thousands of dollars to attorneys, and waited for years in the hope that attorneys could make her status change.

Meanwhile, Flor proved to be an excellent student. She had a dream of becoming a doctor and prepared herself for college. During her senior year of high school, she applied to colleges and for scholarships. She was accepted to a large university in Oregon and was awarded a full-ride scholarship, contingent upon her proof of legal residency. Her parents came to the school for help and the school contacted a congressional representative. The Congressman's staff made contacts on Flor's behalf and arranged for an appointment at the office of the Guatemalan Consul in San Francisco.

A school counselor was preparing to drive Flor from Portland when another call came in to inform us that the appointment had been cancelled. Flor was already eighteen and no longer qualified to use her parents' asylum status. She graduated from high school with no options but to pay her way through college or work illegally.



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How could one of our best students graduate from high school with no clear options for her future? What, if anything, could high school staff do to help a student like Flor?

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Stories like Flor's convinced a number of Roosevelt staff that we must find new ways to help Latino students to succeed in and beyond high school. How could one of our best students graduate from high school with no clear options for her future? What, if anything, could high school staff do to help a student like Flor?

### ***The Birth of Small Schools***

This soul-searching coincided with more change on the political and educational horizon. No Child Left Behind was in full gear and Roosevelt, with low test scores and an "unacceptable" status on state benchmarks, saw the writing on the wall. We needed to change quickly or have our school changed for us from the outside. We had seen reconstitution hit another high school in our district and we feared private takeover or outright closure. Because Roosevelt is geographically isolated on a peninsula in the Northern part of Portland, we knew that our students could not easily travel to other high schools. We needed to change into something better for the sake of all our students.

Roosevelt staff came to a consensus with a plan to close our comprehensive high school and open three small schools in the same building. We traveled to Oakland, California, visited small schools there, and started the work of deciding upon our small school themes. Early on, the idea of a two-way bilingual school was germinating. I was teaching English as a second language (ESL) and social studies at the time and teamed up with my colleague, Elena Garcia Velasco, a Spanish language arts

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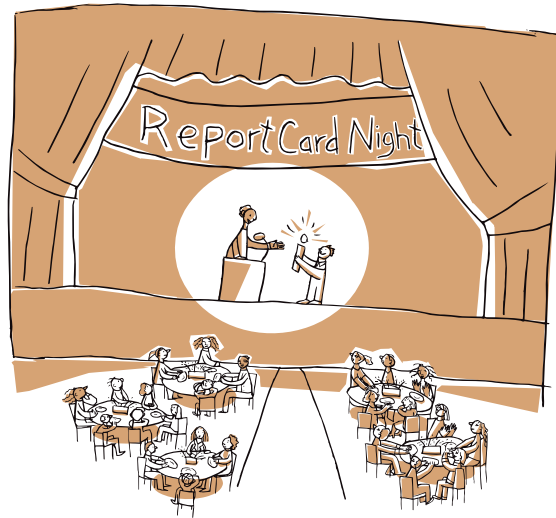
**We endorsed additive bilingualism – the idea that being bilingual gives students more opportunities and helps develop more cognitive flexibility and complexity. This, of course, is the opposite of the subtractive view of bilingualism.**

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teacher, to develop the idea. We felt that the large Latino student population could be an asset in our new school and could help all students become bilingual.

We relied heavily on Wayne Thomas and Virginia Collier's (1997) research on two-way bilingual schools and endorsed additive bilingualism – the idea that being bilingual gives students more opportunities and helps develop more cognitive flexibility and complexity. This, of course, is the opposite of the subtractive view of bilingualism, which sees it as a deficit or a challenge to one's English proficiency. We knew that elite private schools highly valued learning more than one language and we felt we could use our school's linguistic diversity to promote this advantage for all students. While many staff initially felt that a bilingual school was too ambitious an idea, our proposal eventually survived and became one of three thematic schools on our campus.

This school, named SEIS (the Spanish-English International School) by our staff, joined the School of Arts, Communication, and Technology (ACT) and the Pursuit of Wellness Education at Roosevelt (POWER). Small schools began and the name Loser-velt faded from memory.



### ***SEIS: Creating a Thriving Bilingual School***

One of the first decisions we made about SEIS was that all students would take four years of English and four years of Spanish. The English could be ESL or English language arts and the Spanish could be World Language or Spanish language arts, but we agreed that this would be as important in our school as high school graduation requirements. By doing so, we are staying true to our mission, which states:

Our mission is to create bilingual world citizens with deep cultural awareness and the capacity to thrive in universities, careers, and our global community.

We also set out to recruit students to SEIS in such a way that half would be from English-speaking homes and half from Spanish-speaking homes.

Perhaps because our school name starts with the word Spanish and perhaps because of stereotypes and anti-immigrant prejudice, it has been a challenge to help all families understand the benefits of bilingual education.

Much of SEIS's student recruitment work in our mostly open-enrollment district focuses on attracting non-Latino students, because bilingual education has proven to be more obviously attractive to Latino students and families.

### **Success with a High-Needs Student Population**

As a small school with twenty staff (seventeen teachers, one principal, one counselor, and one secretary) and 225 students, we are able to set clear expectations and monitor students closely. We have made strategic decisions to push hard toward academic rigor, while nurturing relationships with and among students. Now in our third year, we offer eight Advanced Placement (AP) or community college credit classes; we have a Mock Trial team, a student-run store, a student government, a small-business class, and a Latin dance class. Our student population is about 63 percent Latino, 13 percent African

American, and 18 percent European American, with smaller, but equal numbers of Asian Pacific Islander and American Indian students. We have the highest free and reduced-price lunch population of any high school in Portland, at 85 percent, and the highest English-language learner population, at 41 percent. More than two-thirds of SEIS eleventh- and twelfth-grade students take at least one and as many as four AP classes – and all who take AP classes take the AP exam. With a majority Latino population, this makes SEIS the school with the most Latino AP students among the fifteen high schools in the district (including comprehensive, alternative, and small schools).

In addition to the academic offerings, we are able to promote many practices that we believe are supporting our students to stay in school and thrive. During our first year, we started a tradition we call Report Card Night, in which we withhold the second semester report cards from the mail and throw a celebration night, complete with student performances and a dinner. We showcase our students' achievements, give awards, and hand-deliver report cards to families. Gone are the once infamous days when a student told his parents that the F on the report card signified *fantástico*. In addition to Report Card Night, we hold student-led conferences, which for two

successive years have drawn over 80 percent of our families. Gone also are the days of hearing teachers assess parent-teacher conferences with statements like, "Well, I got a lot of grading done" or "I never see the parents whom I most need to see."

SEIS also has a thriving student-government model, involving over 10 percent of our students and including students of each racial/ethnic group, special education, talented and gifted, and English-language learners. We get students into the community frequently through all-school and grade-level field trips and internships and activities. One way we have found to promote internships is by giving a teacher one class period to prepare students to use their Spanish in local elementary schools and community organizations. We even have a tradition of challenging students to student-staff soccer and basketball games and having SEIS-only assemblies to build community.





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The SEIS secret has more to do with having a critical mass of students who are focused on a clear goal and who understand that what they already have when they arrive in high school – in this case, fluency in Spanish – is highly valued.

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### **Why It Works**

Of course, as principal of SEIS, I know that our creative and dedicated staff deserves most of the credit for everything good in SEIS – but many of these creative, dedicated staff also taught and worked hard in the former Roosevelt. I also know that this is not *just* a case of *small is beautiful*, because we do not see the same success in all small schools nationally. What is the difference?

The SEIS secret has more to do with having a critical mass of students who are focused on a clear goal and who understand that what they already have when they arrive in high school – in this case, fluency in Spanish – is highly valued. Celebrating and highlighting this factor is a big part of our success. We value bilingualism, which is what all immigrant students we talk to say they also want to attain; sharing this value with our students translates to validation of our students.

### **How We Value Bilingualism**

Carving out enough full-time-equivalent staff positions so that every SEIS student can take four years of English and four years of Spanish is only the first step to valuing bilingualism. In addition, we recruit bilingual staff, and work to help monolingual staff attain Spanish proficiency. We have used grant funds during the past three years to teach a

Spanish class for staff on site, send two teachers to language school in Mexico, and purchase student materials. We have hired a bilingual parent liaison and currently have two teachers on leave: one in Mexico, studying Spanish, and another in Chile, as a Fulbright scholar.

We present our assemblies, parent meetings, and school marketing materials in both English and Spanish and tell our students, when they run for student government, that they must give their speeches in both English and Spanish. While this undoubtedly raises their blood pressure temporarily, we have had fantastic results from these students. In all of this, we are sending the message that we value two languages enough to make ourselves a little vulnerable. We know it makes the meetings a little longer, but we will spend the time to be truly inclusive.

Another student, who started high school in the comprehensive Roosevelt and then chose SEIS when we reconfigured, is Moises. Moises was a member of the first SEIS graduating class and embodies this pride of bilingualism, as well as a passion for justice and dignity for all people.

## ***Moises: This Time, We Could Help***

Moises is a student who started school in Roosevelt and then chose SEIS when small schools were born on our campus. He was an unlikely leader. A Mayan Indian from Southern Mexico, he spent few years in school there, had to eventually leave to work to support himself and his family, and dabbled in drugs and gang life in Mexico. When he was sixteen, he made the journey north to find a better way of life. He landed in Portland, moved in with a brother, and enrolled in school so he could learn English and have a better chance to find a job.

What Moises found in school were many people who believed in him and who saw his natural talent for leadership. He was mentored and nurtured by his teachers until he was eventually a senior in SEIS, taking a college class in high school, and active in student government and the MEChA (Hispanic student rights) organization. In the spring of his senior year, Moises walked into the staff room during lunch and announced to his teachers that he was quitting school. He was undocumented and saw no hope for going to college. He felt that he might as well abandon school to get more hours to work so he would be better able to support his family in Mexico. His father also encouraged him to not waste his time with school if it would never help him in life.

Those of us present that day looked at Moises and told him that we simply would not allow him to quit school. He had too much promise, too much to offer others, and we could not accept him giving up on himself. We

convinced him to stay for the remaining few months he had and vigorously helped him apply for scholarships so he could attend college and pursue his dream of becoming a Spanish teacher.

A year and a half later, Moises is working and attending community college and is a respected and high-profile immigrant-rights advocate. He is financially sustained by \$21,000 that he earned in private scholarships. He maintains the hope in himself that we all have had for him and he comes frequently to SEIS to visit staff and mentor students.

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**Why does one exceptional immigrant student, Moises, have a chance to make his dreams come true, while the other, Flor, does not? Undoubtedly, there are several reasons, but I submit that one is a different school.**

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## ***Flor and Moises: Different School, Different Outcome***

Why does one exceptional immigrant student, Moises, have a chance to make his dreams come true, while the other, Flor, does not? Undoubtedly, there are several reasons, but I submit that one is a different school. Flor's dilemma was not known to us until it was literally too late. She was a minority in the large, comprehensive high school and did not have the same voice to ask for help or share her hopelessness. Moises, on the other hand, was known by every teacher in his school and was valued for possessing a bilingualism that many

teachers and students had to struggle to approximate.

Of course we would not have allowed Flor to quit school or give up on the hope of attending a university any more than we refused to accept this decision by Moises. Had Flor attended SEIS, however, we would have found out sooner of her status, before she turned eighteen, and we would have found a way to help her accept that full-ride scholarship. We also would have had more time to help her apply for and earn private scholarships, which is what Moises was able to do.

Many SEIS staff have a famous Margaret Mead quote hanging in their classroom. It has become something of a motto for us and really illustrates why Moises is in college today: “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”

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