Ni de aquí, ni de allá: Latin@ Youth Crossing Linguistic And Cultural Borders

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Introduction

Although decades ago the U.S. Census Bureau began forecasting that Latin@s would become the largest minority group in the United States of America, in 2005 ordinary citizens were surprised to learn this projection had become a reality. For some, the reality that Latin@s comprised 13% of the U.S. population (Pew Hispanic Center, 2005) was a hard fact to swallow. The additional prediction from the U.S. Census Bureau that by the year 2050, Latin@s will comprise approximately 25% of the U.S. population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2004) presents an even more difficult fact for intake. As researchers it is baffling to note that many school districts ignore these demographic changes until families come knocking on school office doors. The realization of Latin@s becoming a significant student population in urban, suburban and rural U.S. schools is a demographic change mandating that legislators, policy makers, educators and ordinary citizens examine stereotypic information regarding how to best educate a social group who, by all accounts, will continue its very rapid rate of growth (Chapa & De La Rosa, 2004).

While in the past, addressing the educational needs of Latin@ youth was conceived within deficit standpoints of who they are as a monolithic bloc and how they threaten both the future of the English language and U.S. resources, research finds that most Latin@ youth are born in the U.S., and prefer to speak and read English (Zentella, 2005). Additionally, these youth are growing up in order to work in the technical, sales, and administrative support sectors (Chapa & De La Rosa, 2004) of 21st century America. They live productive lives in families whose buying power is growing at impressive rates. Thus, we argue that the education of adolescents living in the current demographic reality cannot be addressed with deficit orientations accepted in the past. Instead, we argue that in U.S. schools experiencing “the Browning of America” (Aponte & Siles, 1994; Johnson, et.al. 1997) students must be approached with affirming orientations. These approaches must effectively address Latin@ students’ educational struggles as they cross a myriad of borders on a daily basis in order to remain engaged in schools.

The purpose of this article is to examine the critical junctures in the social revolution in which Latin@ youth are involved. We will first position ourselves in the argument presented. Then we examine the multiple borders in and out of school that impact the lives of Latin@ youth living in the 21st century. We examine these borders by using an important literacy concept from the Latin@ community: dichos, or insightful sayings for survival. Finally we offer some consejos, or inspirational teachings with intent to influence teachers, parents, and those invested in creating a more caring world for all to share.

Locating ourselves in the question: How do Latin@ students fare in U.S. school?

As a Puerto Rican professor of biliteracy studies teaching in an urban Latin@ serving institution in San Antonio, Texas, and a Mexican American professor of secondary education studies teaching in the urban metropolis of Denver, Colorado, we share combined experiences of living, learning, and researching in diverse settings and locate ourselves in the camp of caring Chicana
theorists. We use the self-identifier of Chicana because we stride across multiple worlds as resilient U.S. educated Latin@s of differing Spanish-speaking heritage. As explained by Alarcón (1990), when we invoke Chicana as a self-identifier we invoke our mestiza (mixed) race and ethnicity, our family working class background, and our gender in their simultaneity and in their complexity as we navigate our personal and academic worlds. Further, we agree with Noddings (1992) who proposes that caring theorists value an ethos of caring and are deeply concerned when the curriculum and schools are not actively promoting a search for connection between teacher and student, between student and family, and among students themselves. These interpersonal connections are the ones that have profound consequences on how Latin@ students’ identities develop and how their academic resiliency is influenced. Fostering an ethic of care endows Chicana educators like us with the responsibility to engage in research, teaching, and writing that place worth on the native languages, histories and cultures of students.

Unfortunately, an ethos of caring is not as acutely embedded in educational thought, practice, and school structures as is deficit thinking. Deficit thinking fuels the perception that Latin@ students are deficient in the attitudes, orientations, strategies, and resources necessary to succeed in U.S. schools. This perception is enacted into low expectations for Latin@ students, and as a result, the achievement gap between Latin@ and White students has remained stagnant. Our purpose in this article is to offer important and improved possibilities for the academic success of Latin@ students.

We propose our argument by using seven dichos that offer insights on the ways that Latin@ youth can be offered quality pathways to navigate secondary education in the 21st century. Dichos are heeded in virtually every corner of the world; they are especially prevalent in Spanish-speaking countries that have strong oral cultural traditions such as Mexico (Chahin, Villarruel, and Viramontez, 1999). According to Ballesteros and Ballesteros (1992), dichos are, “part of the cultural treasure of people because the wisdom, wit, philosophy, psychology, and social values of a cultural group are preserved in their sayings” (p. v). One proverb from the Spanish-speaking world is, Dichos de los viejitos son evangelios chiquitos, “sayings of our elders should be taken as gospel”. This dicho exemplifies how wisdom is passed through oral rituals from respected elders. The significance of this practice is that cultural values and beliefs are being transmitted, reinforced transgenerationally (Chahin, Villarruel, and Viramontez, 1999), and maintained.

We use dichos from the Spanish-speaking world in an effort to acknowledge our political and ethnic relationship to the knowledge and folk wisdom of our own and our students’ communities. In this way we consider and build upon the cultural capital students bring to the classroom. Cultural capital is defined as “the attitudes, beliefs, cultural background, knowledge and skills that are passed from one generation to the next” (Bourdieu cited in Finders, 1997, 37). 

El que habla del camino es porque lo tiene andado

An old Spanish dicho says, “s/he who talks about the journey is the one that’s walked it”. If the message is acknowledged then a logical question follows - what do U.S. Latin@ students say about the road they are walking? One medium that increasingly expresses their voices is rap, the music of the hip-hop culture, readily available on disks, radio, television, and on the Internet. This increased availability of media not only creates “new and unpredictable forms of connection, identification, and cultural affinity, but also dislocation and disjuncture between people, places and cultures” (Gillespie 1995, 7). In the late 1970s, the hip-hop culture emerged onto the national scene with new and unpredictable beats that told the stories of the struggles of African Americans in U.S.
society. Latin@s struggled for acceptance in the hip-hop movement because when it blasted onto the music arena in the 1980’s it was perceived as “black music” (Ocaña, 2005, 144). In 1990 Latin rap hit the national airwaves through the rhymes of a Cuban American rapper, Mellow Man Ace, who unleashed a Spanglish rap single that reached the top of the music charts. That same year, Mexican American rapper Kid Frost scored a hit with his bilingual song, “La Raza” (Ocaña, 2005). Since then, through hip-hop and rap, Latin@ youth have represented and expressed their lived experiences through “spaces of resistance to the dominant order arising precisely from their subordinate, peripheral, or marginalized positioning” (Soja, 1996, p. 68). One influential Latino rap artist of Mexican descent, Jae-P (Juan Pablo Huerta), has used the lyrics of his songs to describe the tactical strategies he uses to communicate about the borderlands that many Latin@ youth live in and where they must make choices. The text of his own lived experience is embedded in the chorus of his award-winning rap song, *Ni de aquí, ni de allá*.

| Mexico yo te quiero y me quiero regresar pero tu gente no me entiende y jamás me aceptará  | Mexico, I love you and I want to return to you, but your people do not understand me and they will never accept me |
| Porque no soy de aquí ni soy de allá  | Because I’m not from here and I’m not from there |
| Pero aquí es donde me gusta, aquí me voy a quedar  | But I like it here and here I’ll stay |
| Porque no soy de aquí ni soy de allá  | Because I’m not from here and I’m not from there |
| Con dos acentos en la lengua llegaré a triunfar  | With two accents I will still triumph |
| Porque no soy de aquí ni soy de allá  | Because I’m not from here and I’m not from there |
| Pero aquí es donde me gusta, aquí me voy a quedar  | But I like it here and here I’ll stay |
| Porque no soy de aquí ni soy de allá  | Whether you like it or not, I will be accepted |
| Te guste o no te guste, a mí me van a aceptar  |  |

This counter narrative and soundscape (Chambers, 1990) is produced to increase understanding of and within the Latin@ youth culture. It personifies the struggle of a Mexican American, caught between two worlds, a fusion of two languages and cultures, a clash of two languages and cultures, a marginalized space. Jae-P’s story challenges nationalistic discourse about nationality and language. Jae-P’s story claims and creates a dynamic new space of representation that Anzaldúa refers to as nepantla – a space where one places their feet between worlds, identities, and cultures. This phenomenon of living in *nepantla*, invites overlaps and hybridity in anticipation of liberating possibilities. It is where linguistic and cultural borders are crossed and old identities are transformed (Fránquiz & Reyes, 1998; Fránquiz, 1999). Although Jae-P represents only one voice of the Mexican American experience, Spanish and Spanglish rap are increasingly conceived by Latin@ youth as a means of constructing and expressing their authentic selves.

Rap is a medium Latino youth choose to express the reality of growing up in their communities. When teachers are able to view rap from a cultural lens and rappers as cultural workers they are better able to build cultural synchronization in their classrooms. According to Glenn Paul (2000), researchers such as Gay (1993) and Irvine (1991) theorize cultural synchronization as the harmony established between the cultural systems of schools, diverse groups of learners, and the
communities from which those learners come. From her work with teachers in New York, Glenn Paul (2000) suggests that cultural synchronization can materialize when teachers affirm student’s personal knowledge, include rap and other critical media texts in the curriculum, and create a respectful and responsive style of classroom discourse where students can interrogate borders, try on hybrid identities, and emerge with authentic voices.

**Donde Hay Gana Hay Maña**

This saying signifies, “where there is a will there is a way.” This piece of wisdom is important because many Latin@ students in U.S. public schools are swimming against a current of underachievement. The current reality is that Latin@ students consistently attain lower scores on standardized reading, writing, math, and science assessments, and they are overrepresented in special education programs and vocational tracks (Villegas and Lucas, 2002). In addition, Latin@ students experience higher drop-out rates and lower high school completion rates compared to their White, African American, and Asian American counterparts (Education Trust, 2003). The high school non-completion rate for Latin@ youth is triple that of white students and double that of African Americans (Fry, 2003). In addition, the high school completion rate for Latin@s has actually decreased in the last decade (Haney et. al, 2005). These grim statistics show that for many Latin@ youth within the U.S. this piece of folk wisdom passed from generation to generation is now questionable. Fortunately, a growing body of research in the area of academic resiliency demonstrates how pathways can be paved to support the development of Latin@ students’ academic identities and consequently, their academic resiliency in high school.

In their ethnographic study of a high school with a growing population of Latin@ students, Fránquiz and Salazar (2004) identified critical elements that fostered academic resiliency. These were consejos (verbal teachings, Elenes et. al., 2001), confianza (mutual trust), buen ejemplo (exemplary models), and respeto (respect). Their findings have been corroborated by many other research studies including consejos (Delgado-Gaitán, 1994; Valdés, 1996; Villenas & Moreno, 2001), confianza (Veléz-Ibañez, 1996; Aspiazu, Bauer, and Spillett, 1998), buen ejemplo, (Riojas-Clark & González, 1998; Stanton-Salazar, 2001; Stanton-Salazar & Spina, 2003), and respeto (Váldes, 1996). In their model for Chicano/Mexicano students’ academic success, Fránquiz and Salazar (2004) described how “an emphasis on constant ongoing teaching through consejos” (verbal teachings) reflected the values and types or literate practices favored by family members and their community networks. One such consejo often used by Mexican immigrant students in their study was the phrase, ¡Echale Ganas! (Try your hardest!). Students used this particular verbal teaching repeatedly to instill a sense of urgency and confidence in one another. They recognized a common struggle and served as advocates for each other rather than taking on the journey toward academic achievement alone.

**Aunque seas muy grande y rico necesitas del pobre y chico**

Another dicho among Spanish speakers points out, “even though you may be wealthy and all mature you can still learn from the poor and the small”. This dicho can be drawn upon to highlight the contrasting demographics of teachers and students in U.S. public schools. While Latin@ students comprised 17% of total public school enrollments in 2003, only 6% of public school teachers were Latin@ that same year (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). According to the National Center of Educational Statistics (2006), 83% of teachers are White. This is significant because White teachers are more likely to come from “racially segregated, middle-class suburban communities
and have attended predominantly White schools” (Villegas & Lucas, 2002, p. xx). As a result, White teachers from middle-class backgrounds often have a facile understanding of the socio-cultural, economic, and linguistic experiences of their Latin@ students.

In contrast to their teachers, the National Center of Educational Statistics (2006), reports that 28% of Latin@ children in the United States live in poverty. According to a study by the Civil Rights Project at Harvard University (Orfield & Yun, 1999), Latin@ students are becoming increasingly racially, economically, and linguistically isolated in U.S. public schools. Findings of the project established that Latin@ children now face the most intense segregation of any ethnic and racial group in the United States. They experience significantly less contact with non-Latino whites and are likely to attend a school where they are exposed to less credentialed teachers, high teacher turnover, and lower educational aspirations and career options than students in more desegregated settings (The Piton Foundation, 2006).

The chasm between the socio-economic, socio-cultural and linguistic realities of teachers and students make it challenging for teacher education programs to address the mismatch. New approaches are needed to counter the current situation where many teachers from “mainstream” backgrounds view linguistic and cultural diversity as an obstacle to be overcome versus a resource to be tapped (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Often faced with the barriers of poverty and lack of English fluency along with deficit orientations on the part of their teachers, many Latin@ students require far greater attention and support from schools in order to attain higher levels of academic achievement. In order to support increased academic achievement, teacher education programs should support teachers in setting high expectations for students. Such high expectations are not possible without honoring the principles students themselves identify as critical for their learning. For example, Latin@ students interviewed in Colorado (Fránquiz & Salazar, 2004) described key experiences in their learning.

• we were all seen as leaders
• each and every one could “put ideas up” for consideration by the class
• we were made to feel safe
• before “throwing a label,” everyone got a chance—“basically everyone got respeto (respect)”
• there was an expectation and responsibility to share about yourself
• there was an expectation and responsibility to help each other
• there was an expectation and responsibility to make people feel like they are important
• everyone was part of a team and team building had to be continuous
• arguing was considered important for discussion
• it was everyone’s responsibility to spread unity throughout the school

The predominantly Mexican American students that were interviewed stated that when the above principles were embraced between teacher and student, and among peers, there was a remarkable impact on their social consciousness and in their lives within and beyond the classroom.

Teacher preparation programs can frame their dialogue in ways that promote student efficacy. Clearly, all children, including children of color living in poverty, can identify factors that have a robust influence on their engagement with each other and school. They are very capable agential beings—beings that can use personal agency in the solution of their own and collective problems. The job of teacher educators, then, is to elicit, listen, and take seriously students’ small, and not so small, voices so that they may bridge the great divide that often separates the realities of teachers and students.
No le tengan miedo al chile, aunque lo vean bien colorado

A dicho that addresses xenophobic fear says: “don’t be afraid of the chili pepper even though you see its vibrant redness”. Underlying this saying is one’s ability to recognize the characteristics inherent in each chili pepper. Metaphorically, Latin@ youth represent many different types of chili peppers. According to the U.S. Census (2000), Mexicans comprise the largest sub-group of the Latino population, at 58.5%, followed by Puerto Ricans, 9.6%, and Cubans 3.5%. Central and South Americans comprise 8.6% of the U.S. population. With increasing migration from many countries in Central and South America as well as the Caribbean, it is important to acknowledge that Latin@ youth experience language socialization differently depending on their familial and national background. Consequently, their response to personal and group histories, national and local policies are varied and are deeply influenced by the depth of their transnational networks. In fact, in cities such as Los Angeles and San Antonio, youth from Central and South America feel invisible and struggle against being culturally and linguistically swamped by the local majority Mexican population (Lavadenz, 2005). One of the greatest challenges in teacher education for the 21st century is to construct a pedagogy responsive to the complex set of varied experiences that Latin@ youth possess toward school, home, heritage language, and ethnic community.

Equally as complex are public fears that the nation cannot absorb any more immigrants or refugees. “English only” legislation and initiatives attacking bilingual education focus on the Americanization and socialization of immigrants and refugees to English as quickly as possible. The result is that Latin@ students are too often “marching steadily toward English monolingualism” (Swarns, 2004, p. 26).

The English imperative impacts the lives of many Latin@ immigrants who feel unwelcome in and outside of school. For example, in a California study with over 360 immigrant youth, 70% of the high school students reported severe tensions and problems with American-born teens. A significant part of the tension focused on linguistic issues (Olsen & Chen, 1988) within the structures of isolated ESL programs as well as within social relations at school. Becoming American in this context included discriminatory experiences of ridicule, scorn, rejection, put-downs, and efforts to freeze immigrant newcomers out of the social world of English speaking youth. Olsen (2000) reports, “This is not an additive process whereby English and the home language coexist. It is a subtractive exchange. Losing one’s language is the price of admission….Being caught between two language worlds often leads to silence” (p. 198). This is aptly expressed by Concepción, an immigrant from Mexico documented by Olsen (1998).

I sometimes don’t have Spanish words anymore for the feelings I have here, and I don’t yet have English words for them either. Or I can’t find the English words that explain what I know and have felt in my Mexican life. The words don’t work for me. I have become quiet. Because I don’t have words. I don’t even try to use my Spanish. I only wait until I know my English (pp. 99-100).

The scenario described by Concepción is in stark contrast to research showing that students who continue to develop academic and cognitive skills in their native language are more likely to succeed in learning a second language than students who do not develop their native language literacy skills (August & Hakuta, 1998). Some Latin@ immigrant and bilingual youth recognize the great costs associated with learning English and agree to pay the price; others will not. Those who do not will be critical of those who do and accuse them of “acting gringo” (Fránquiz & Salazar,
2004). Such contrasting responses keep Latin@s divided as a social group and unappreciative of the differences between them. Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) named the consequence of internalizing impoverished beliefs about native language use as linguistic terrorism. She explains,

Chicanas who grew up speaking Chicano Spanish have internalized the belief that we speak poor Spanish. It is illegitimate, a bastard language. And because we internalize how our language has been used against us by the dominant culture, we use our language differences against each other. (p. 58)

Fortunately, rap artists such as Jae-P expose the language and education issues. One of his latest hits is Latin@s Unid@s. He makes it clear that for the Latin@ community, whose children drop out in numbers and at rates much higher than all other groups, educational attainment has reached a crisis level and families must pay the price. Following are the words for the final verse of the song. It describes the responsibility of Latin@s to stop fighting with each other, to claim their right to an authentic representation of their culture and history, and to concentrate on the education of the children.
Si nos unimos tendremos un mejor futuro
Hay que ayudarnos hay que apoyarnos
Solo así conquistaremos that's right
No hay raza mejor que la mia
Unidos alcanzaremos pase nuestra vida
Tenemos el deber de mejorar este pais
Mostrar nuestra cultura y la manera de vivir
No dejar que Taco Bell represente al
Mexicano
Que nuestros hijos no abandonen su pasado
Que se vayan de casita cuando es hora de estudiar
No importa solo así van a triunfar
Que terminen la high school y la universidad
Que no se rompan la espalda, al trabajar
Unidos, no vencidos, a lo que venimos
Hace falta plata en el país, buscar otro camino
Es gacho pero cierto pa’ el gobierno de aquí
Nos es suficiente que suframos, nos quieren destruir
Por ahí dijo Emiliano Zapata
“PREFERO MORIR PARADO QUE VIVIR A GATAS”

¿Latinos unidos como dicen? Jamás serán vencidos
Latinos unidos, luchando por un mejor camino
¿Latinos unidos como dicen? Jamás serán vencidos
Latinos unidos, peleando pa’ cambiar nuestro destino

LATINOS UNIDOS
LATINOS UNIDOS

If we unite we will have a better future
We need to help and support each other
That’s the only way to win, that’s right
There is no raza better than mine
United we will advance even if our life ends
We have the responsibility to improve this country
To demonstrate our culture and manner of living
We cannot let Taco Bell represent what is Mexican
Or let our children abandon their history
May they leave their home when it is time to study
It doesn’t matter because that is the only way to triumph
May they finish high school and college
May they not break their back working
United, not defeated, this is why we came
Money fails us in [our] nation, take another road
It’s harsh but clear for the government here
It’s not enough that we suffer, they want to destroy us
This is why Emiliano Zapata said,
I PREFER TO DIE STANDING THAN LIVE ON MY KNEES.

Latinos united, what do you say? We’ll never be defeated
Latinos united, struggling for a better life
Latinos united, what do you say? We’ll never be defeated
Latinos united, fighting to change our destiny

UNITED LATINOS
UNITED LATINOS

The metaphor of the chile reminds us to take a stand about the equality of all peppers. Whether it is the teacher or the rap artist, our job as the advocates for the adolescent Latin@ population is to not accept intolerance, racism, or linguistic terrorism targeted at Latin@ youths and their familial and social networks.
Más enseña la adversidad que diez años de universidad

When one considers that “adversity teaches more than ten years of university”, a natural question emerges, what does adversity teach? This question is pertinent as Latin@ parents are the primary teachers of their children. They work hard to provide educación (moral education) and not merely formal education for their children. Educación is the quality of behaving in the world with good manners (Reese, Balzano, Gallimore, & Goldenberg, 1994), dignity, and respeto, respect for oneself and others. Many Latin@ parents do not follow a teacher model of parenting. Researchers Scribner, Young, and Pedroza (1999) found that educators described parental involvement as encompassing the following: participation in activities such as school events, meetings, workshops, and governance activities; working as teacher’s aides and tutors, and school advocates in the larger school community. Latin@ parents are often judged by educators because they typically have no direct contact with their children’s teachers as noted in a community study of schools in Georgia.

In Mexico, parents generally do not promote their children’s interests with teachers and administrators (McClelland & Chen, 1997; Romo, 1996; Valdes, 2001). The parent’s role is to support teachers and let them do their jobs. Assertive parents in the United States sometimes request more appropriate or challenging assignments for their children, a cultural act that would be foreign to most Latino immigrants. Also, Latino parents who are newcomers to the community must work long and sometimes irregular hours, and their schedules often do not coincide with school hours. These cultural and economic issues, along with the difficulty of communicating in English, may account for why some parents in the study had no direct contact with educators. (McLaughlin et. al., 2002, p. 226)

From the explanation above, it is clear that Latin@ parents conceptualize parental involvement differently than teachers do. Many Latin@ families place less emphasis and resources on books and reading and more emphasis on knowing right from wrong, displaying respectful and cooperative behavior, and observing before participating. Furthermore, Latin@ families focus on providing nurturance, instilling cultural values, talking with children, and sending them to school well fed, clean, and rested (Scribner, Young, and Pedroza, 1999). Unfortunately, the aforementioned familial resources are often discounted and Latin@ families are vilified for not instilling appropriate educational (real middle class) values in their children. For example, even though reading is not a magic bullet that guarantees academic success, Latin@ families are judged negatively for not having books and reading to their children on a consistent basis. Zentella (2005) raises an important question, how much damage is done to parents by constructing them as incompetent because they do not read to their children? She continues,

When I was a child, I thought my mother invented Scrabble because she cut paper bags into squares and wrote a letter of the alphabet on each; we sat on the floor and put words together. Mami also had me copy and memorize long poems in Spanish and English, which I recited to visitors and at my father’s Mexican society’s veladas (cultural soirées), where I learned formal Spanish by imitating the guest speakers. My teachers never knew that I had those abilities, and I doubt they would have judged me college material if they had heard mami’s rants against too much reading and reliance on books. (p. 27)
Like Zentella’s mother, Latin@ parents often support the literacy development of their children through oral traditions that are prevalent in Spanish-speaking countries. One of the ongoing challenges in the 21st century is to convince educators that even parents who have little formal education contribute significantly to their children’s literacy understanding, (Auerbach, 1997). Language and literacy are not simply vehicles of communication and socialization, “but the site of a highly politicized and vitriolic debate” (González, 2001: 54) that privileges some ways with words and excludes others.

Latin@ families grapple with considerable adversity in their journey to raise academically successful and culturally competent youth. Several research studies emphasize the importance of integrating Latin@ parents into the school community (Miramontes, Nadeau, & Commins 1997; Delgado-Gaitán, 1992; Smith, et al., 2002) and building a curriculum that is compatible with parents’ goals for their children (Moll, et al., 1992).

Quien sabe dos lenguas vale por dos

“He who knows two languages counts for two.” This dicho is printed on posters that can be seen in bilingual classrooms across the United States, at least in those states that are not restricted from providing bilingual instruction. In quality bilingual instructional programs, Spanish language proficiency is considered an asset, not a liability. For dual language programs proficiency in English and at least one other language is provided to all students. Bringing two linguistic groups together for a common purpose can provide an excellent bilingual climate for social and academic learning (Smith, et. al., 2002). Dual or two-way immersion requires that everyone muster up the courage to cross both linguistic and cultural boundaries, not just immigrants and refugee students. Guerra (1998) described immigrant communities that maintained their native language and culture through travel and contact with their homeland as “transnational” communities. Perhaps U.S. born teachers should take serious note regarding the advantages of becoming bilingual and transnational beings in their own lives. Additionally, their school districts should provide incentives for their bilingual professional development. It seems logical that with instant communication across the world via the Internet and economic globalization, the urgency for success in a multilingual and multicultural global community requires border crossings by everyone. Important to keep in mind is that border crossings ought not be painful and the job of education ought to be the facilitation of socialization into multiple communities and transnational life worlds.

Research by Gándara (1995) showed that high achieving Latin@s moved successfully and fluidly between the culture of the barrio or the fields and the culture of high achieving Anglos in spite of the literacy levels of parents. These findings suggest that bicultural dispositions are essential for the academic success of Latin@s and perhaps, even for their teachers. Contrary to the messages of individuals such as Ron Unz, author of Propositions in California, Arizona, and Massachusetts that essentially made bilingual education inaccessible in K-12 classrooms, Stanton-Salazar & Dornbushch, (1995) found that students who are bilingual have larger information networks, leading to higher grades. Additionally, Rumberger and Larson (1998) found that bilingual students had higher graduation rates than students who speak only English or Spanish even after controlling for socioeconomic background. These studies demonstrate that there ought to be more teachers in schools practicing a humanizing pedagogy that values bilingualism, biculturalism and biliteracy for everyone. After all, “lo que se aprende en la niñez dura hasta la vejez,” what is learned as a child lasts a lifetime.
As children, we, las dos Marias (the two authors of this article), were denied our native language in the classroom. In Denver, Colorado, Maria Salazar was supported with bilingual education in Kindergarten as she began her educational journey. However, in first grade she was placed in a mainstream English classroom. Kindergarten marked the end of her venture with bilingual education. Maria Franquiz began her literacy development in Spanish at a Catholic elementary school in Puerto Rico. However, when her military father was transferred to the U.S. mainland, she attended seven different schools, public and private, and Department of Defense schools. Both Marias experienced an imbalance in their receptive and productive skills in the Spanish and English languages but not in their bicultural orientations. They kept the vision of an imagined biliterate community, to use Anderson’s (1983) metaphor. In this imagined community they held on to the view that members could reach their highest academic and social potential. It was this persistent, if not obstinate, belief in the power of two languages that made them resilient despite of the sparks of linguistic and cultural terrorism.

Because middle and high schools make “foreign” languages available as course options, students can enroll and begin to reclaim the study of the native language that was denigrated or erased during elementary school years. It is the forced border crossing from the native language, in this case Spanish, to English-only instruction that has the power to homogenize. It is not that children are passive victims of linguistic and cultural hegemony, but that the subordination of their primary socialization from the home may delimit social and academic identity choices. In so many ways youth must construct the self within multiple contexts of domination. They must resist these oppressive forces and struggle for recognition. As Anzaldúa wrote in her preface to Borderlands/La Frontera, “It’s not a comfortable territory to live in, this place of contradictions” between family language and school language, family culture and popular culture, educación and education. On the other hand, Anzaldúa (1987) theorized about building tolerance for ambiguity, the placing of one’s feet in the spaces where worlds, identities, and cultures overlap. This is the phenomenon of living in nepantla, the in-between space that is more a synthesis than contradiction, dispositions that are hybrid rather than assimilative, a confluence that is creative in anticipation of liberating possibilities.

Conclusion and Consejos:

La persona no ha de ser de dichos sino de hechos

This dicho is translated in many different languages and suggests that “a person should not be made of talk but of deeds.” The wisdom of this dicho can be turned into a question - As a parent, or philosopher, or teacher, or global citizen, do you walk your talk? More than four decades ago George Z.F. Bereday (1964) addressed the issue of walking the talk in education. He wrote:

Education is a mirror held against the face of a people. Nations may put on blustering shows of strength to conceal public weakness, erect great facades to conceal shabby backyards, and profess peace while secretly arming for conquest, but how they take care of their children tells unerringly who they are. (p. 5)

We contend that nations from around the globe are struggling to take care of all of their children. Nations like the United States, England, Ireland, Australia, France, Germany, Spain, Canada, China, South Africa, India, Israel, and Latvia are engaging in the formation and implementation of national educational policies for “minority” groups (Glen, & de Jong, 1996; Ray & Poonwassie, 1992; Salili & Hoosain, 2001). According to LeTendre (2000), the preponderance of cross-national educational literature displays a strong emphasis on “minority problems” (p. 579). LeTendre contends that
educational policies that focus on “minority problems” may themselves generate sources of significant obstacles for achievement among students of color including Latin@s. In fact, rather than moving toward an approach that affirms increasing diversity and fosters the development of multiculturalism, there is a trend toward standardization throughout the world. LeTendre (2000) states,

There is an international trend toward isomorphism in public school systems in virtually every country in the world. Classrooms look the same, curriculums are highly similar, even teacher-student interactions are fairly standard, at least compared to the diversity recorded in the educational situations of pre-literate societies. (p. 580)

Like many nations, the United States has moved toward a “standardized, uniform national curriculum” (Peregoy and Boyle, 2005, p. 21). The trend toward standardization and high-stakes testing has been strengthened in the U.S. by the implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB). The NCLB Act has raised standardized testing to a frenzied pitch never before seen, requiring states to implement accountability systems marked by high-stakes testing. In the United States, high-stakes testing has become the end-all-be-all solution to the achievement gap between mainstream predominately middle class students and students of color typically attending under resourced schools. Valenzuela (2005) found that a standardized approach to education encouraged a reductionistic, test-driven curriculum; promoted a uniform and objectivist way of knowing, and was detrimental to diverse cultures, languages, and approaches to knowledge. Valenzuela (2005) also found that study after study indicated that high-stakes testing policies “are harmful to all children, especially for children from poor, minority, or non-English-speaking families” (p. 2). Despite mounting evidence that the standardization of education is failing many children, the movement toward standardization has taken a chokehold on public schools across nations, causing educators to gasp from the constrictions of a one-size-fits-all curriculum that immobilizes their efforts to meet the diverse needs of children.

If a society is to be judged by the way they take care of their children, let the United States and all countries of the world be judged as civilizations that are not made of talk, but of deeds. Let all nations of the world create educational systems that are responsive to the needs of their diverse populations by honoring the voices of all children and their families; by fostering affirming attitudes toward all children and their parents; by preparing educators to navigate different cultural frames of reference; by nourishing cultural and flexible citizenship; by taking a stand against oppression, prejudice, and discrimination; by coaching students to take responsibility for their own learning; by actually valuing bilingualism and multilingualism versus just saying they do; by assessing the learning of children through multiple approaches, and above all, by nourishing hope that all nations can become motherlands that actually leave no child behind.

The songs that adolescents construct in rap or more traditional modes are narratives about the multiple worlds that influence their social and academic choices. These narratives are pedagogical. They can be kept separate and used in divided worlds or they can be overlapped. Delgado Bernal (2001) argues that Chicana feminist pedagogies “are partially shaped by collective experiences and community memory. Community and family knowledge is taught to youth through such ways as legends, corridos, storytelling, and behavior” (p. 4) and, we argue, in dichos. If pedagogies from the Latin@ communities merit their rightful place in classroom that youth inhabit, then it is time for educators to consider the creative and transformative potential of crossing over with their students
to nepantla, the in-between space of an imagined bilingual, bicultural, and biliterate community. ¡El que adelante no mira, atrás se queda (S/he who doesn't look ahead, stays behind)!
References


(Endnotes)

1 The vast majority of Latin@xs identify themselves in relation to the country from which they or their ancestors originate such as Cuban American, Mexican American, Boricua (referring to the indigenous name of Puerto Rico), Dominicano, etc. Latin@xs may be of any race. Latina and Latino critical race (LatCrit) theorists use the ampersand as a symbol of gender unity and present an interdisciplinary research grounded in the experience and knowledge of people of color (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002:23).

2 For a more detailed examination of the home literacy practice known as consejos see Delgado-Gaitan, 1994; Valdés, 1996; Villenas & Moreno, 2001; Fránquiz & Salazar, 2004.