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Latina/o Education and Its Effects on Overall Job Success

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Author's Note

Megan Lee is a freshman student at Eastern Washington University. This paper was presented at the 19th Annual EWU Research and Creative Works Symposium on May 18, 2016 in Cheney, WA and was submitted as an assignment for First Year Experience (FYE): Trues, Lies & Uncertainties (ITGS 120-03; Spring 2016)

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ABSTRACT

Young Hispanics today struggle with the American education system, especially those that are foreign-born. This is because Latina/o immigrants are part of an education system that is inadequate to meet their educational needs. A common problem immigrant's face in the classroom is their inability to communicate. Also, teachers are not trained to communicate effectively with their student populations. For example, according to the National Education Association only 2.5% of teachers who instruct bilingual students have a degree in ESL-bilingual education. This can be a factor for which Latina/o immigrants score lower on standardized tests and the shortcomings associated with an inadequate education system reflect the type of jobs held by this population. In the United States, Latina/o's make up a sizable percentage of the total workforce, however they still face job discrimination and income inequality in natural resource, construction, and maintenance jobs. Using peer review academic sources, this study explores how the American education system is ill prepared to meet the needs of Latina/o immigrants and their success or lack thereof reflects the quality of education they received. Finally, the study addresses how the education system can be reformed, to better serve the needs of the Latina/o population.

Key Words: ELL, Service Occupations, Education, Chicana/o Latina/o

Latina/o Education and Its Effects on Overall Job Success

Young Hispanics today struggle with the American education system, especially those that are foreign-born. This is because Latina/o immigrants are part of an education system that is inadequate to meet their educational needs. A common problem immigrant's face in the classroom is their inability to communicate. Also, teachers are not trained to communicate effectively with their student populations. For example, according to the National Education Association only 2.5% of teachers who instruct bilingual students have a degree in ESL-bilingual education. As a result, Latina/o immigrants score lower on standardized tests and the shortcomings associated with an inadequate education system reflect the type of jobs held by this population. In the United States, Latina/o's make up a sizable percentage of the total workforce, however they still face job discrimination and income inequality in natural resource, construction, and maintenance jobs. The American education system is ill prepared to meet the needs of foreign-born Latina/o immigrants and their success or lack thereof reflects the quality of education they received. The American education system needs to be adapted, to better serve the needs of the Latina/o population.

In an article published in March titled "What Latino Students Want From School," Jason G Irizarry discusses the shortcoming in the U.S. education system in regards to minority groups, predominantly Latino students. Irizarry (2015) argues that there needs to be more done to improve the education experiences of Latino students as they are the "largest minority group of students in the United States" (pg.66). "Approximately 13 percent of all U.S. Latinos between the ages of 16 and 24 don't have a high school diploma or the equivalent" (Irizarry, 2015, pg. 66). To raise awareness to the issue Irizarry invited seven Latino high school students to be part of his multigenerational research projects which he called *FUERTE* (Future Urban Educators

condensing Research to Transform Education- also meaning *strong* in Spanish). His goal was to “examine schooling experiences and learning opportunities for Latino students and develop recommendations for educators, researchers, and policymakers” (Irizarry, 2015, pg. 66). During the time Irizarry (2015) was working with the students he collected a “multiyear ethnographic study” on their experiences which consisted of interviews, student work products, field notes, video recordings, presentations, and conferences (pg. 66). He then came up with three distinct themes that school districts need to implement into their curriculum to better suit Latino students. First, districts “need to counter deficit perspectives.” This suggests that the cultural traits of students need to be adapted by their community (Irizarry, 2015, pg. 67). The second reform Irizarry suggests is to “broaden the concept of culture.” This reform is aimed at bringing a variety of cultures and languages into the school setting (Irizarry, 2015, pg. 68). The final step Irizarry (2015) suggests is to “close opportunity gaps,” which emphasizes that course curriculum is not “dumbed down” for Latino students (pg. 69). When his students were asked what they wanted from educators, their responses varied. Taína quotes “I want teachers to teach me like they want me to go to the best college, how they would want teachers to teach their own kids” (Irizarry, 2015, pg. 68). This quote illuminates the “dumbed down” style of teaching which is commonly put in place with Chicano students. Alberto quotes “Support undocumented students. If you want the best for us, support the Dream Act to give us a chance, a real chance, to go to college and have a career” (Irizarry, 2015, pg. 68). Irizarry’s study gives a personal look into the lives of Chicano students through his research project *FUERTE*, and he illuminates the problems in educating Latinos.

David Becerra in his study “Perceptions of Educational Barriers Affecting the Academic Achievement of Latino K-12 Students” examines the adult Latino’s perceptions of educational

barriers affecting Latino students in grades k-12. His audience is targeted at school social workers. “School social workers can play an important role in bridging the gap that most often exists between schools and the local community, especially in low socioeconomic status and racial and ethnic minority communities” (Becerra, 2012, pg. 167). In these communities is where Latino students struggle the most. Becerra (2012) explains that “Latino students tend to have lower grades, lower scores on standardized tests, higher dropout rates than do students from other ethnic groups” (pg. 167). The National Education Association reports in their article titled “The Crisis in the Education of Latino Students” that Latino students score lower on reading tests than their non-Hispanic Peers from kindergarten to eight grade. “Upon entering kindergarten 42% of Latino children are found in the lowest quartile of performance on reading readiness compared to just 18% of White children. By 4th grade, 16% of Latino students are proficient in reading according to the 2005 NAEP, compared to 41% of White students. A similar pattern is notable at the 8th grade, where only 15% of Latinos are proficient in reading compared to 39% of Whites” (Gándara, 2008, pg.1). Latino’s make up a sizeable portion of the United States population. The Latino population has increased 43 percent from 2000 to 2010, this why it’s important to educate Latino students effectively (Becerra, 2012, pg. 167). Becerra (2012) points out that “acculturation has been found to have a negative impact on the health, behavior, and academic achievement of Latinos in the United States” (pg. 168). This may be due to the fact that most Latinos feel like they have ties to their native language. Two of the most common ways to measure acculturation are “language and generational status” as stated by Becerra on pg. 168. Similarly, one of Latino student’s main disadvantages in the classroom are language barriers. “Forty-five percent of all Latino students in U.S. public schools are classified as ELLs, and 79% of ELLs in elementary schools are Latino...59 percent of ELLs in elementary

schools were U.S. born, 18 percent were U.S. born with U.S.-born parents, and 24 percent were foreign born” (Becerra, 2012, pg. 169). English Language Learners varied by generation. This study shows the amount of ELL children enrolled in public schools who may or may not be struggling due to the language gap. Becerra outlines how acculturation and language barriers contribute to shortcomings in Chicano education.

Chicano education and job shortcoming are closely related. “Approximately 13 percent of all U.S. Latinos between the ages of 16 and 24 don’t have a high school diploma or the equivalent” (Becerra, 2012, pg. 167) and employed Latinos are less likely to hold a college degree compared to their white or African American counterparts. “Only about one in six employed Latino’s above the age of 25 holds a college degree” (Cárdenas and Kerby, 2012, pg. 2). This is less than half the portion of employed whites. Because of the absence of a college degree, Latinos are 78.5 percent more likely to work in the private sector than their white counterparts and less likely to hold government and executive level jobs (Cárdenas and Kerby, 2012, pg. 2). Likewise, unemployment rates for Latinos depend on educational attainment. Research shows that unemployment tends to be higher for Latinos who have fewer years of schooling. “In 2011 unemployment for Latinos with only a high school degree was 10.3 percent, compared to 8.4 percent of whites with only a high school degree” (Cárdenas and Kerby, 2012, pg. 3). As a result of Latinos not holding college degrees, they commonly hold positions in service occupations. Construction jobs employ the majority of Latino workers accounting for 15.1 percent of the total Latino labor force. Next in line are repair and maintenance and personal and laundry service jobs which account for 14.9 percent. Next are administrative and support; and waste management and remediation services jobs at 13.9 percent. Then are the healthcare and social assistance jobs at 10.4 percent. Finally, the transportation and water using jobs at 8.9

percent (Cárdenas and Kerby, 2012, pg. 3). During the Great Recession employment rates fell drastically for Latinos in service occupations; mostly jobs in construction, manufacturing and professional business services. There were 1.1 million jobs lost among Latino workers, however The Bureau of Labor Statistics projects that construction industry will grow by 2.9 percent annually through 2020 (Cárdenas and Kerby, 2012, pg. 3). This illuminates how minimal schooling can affect future job stability. Shortcoming in Chicano education is a leading reason why Chicanos hold service jobs and are commonly not involved in government or executive level positions. These jobs require college degrees and when one in six employed Latinos above the age of 25 hold a college degree this makes it hard for them to advance in the workforce.

Latino immigrants make up a higher percentage of work-related fatalities than any other ethnic group, this may be due to language barriers. “Construction has a higher Latino fatality risk than any industry except mining, and it is the industry division with the most Latino nonfatal injuries” (Vázquez and Stalnaker, 2004, pg. 24). Along with being the leaders in construction fatality, Latinos now represent approximately 15 percent of the construction workforce in the United States (Vázquez and Stalnaker, 2004, pg. 24). In order to combat the problems that are causing high fatality in Latinos we must understand Latino language, literacy and culture. (Vázquez and Stalnaker, 2004, pg. 24). “Transportation incidents, contact with objects and equipment, and falls are the most frequent categories of fatal accidents experienced by Latinos.” “The most frequent Latino nonfatal work injury is being struck with objects and equipment, comprising almost 38 percent of the Latino injuries” (Vázquez and Stalnaker, 2004, pg. 25). A key reason why Latinos report more fatalities/ work related injuries than other groups is because of language barriers. “Few Latinos speak English when they enter the U.S. according to National Safety Council’s “2003 Salary Survey” more than 71 percent of companies employ people

whose native language is not English or who do not speak English” (Vázquez and Stalnaker, 2004, pg. 26). Because traditional safety training is taught in English, this instruction is termed “useless” because “Latinos with low literacy skills may not comprehend the message” (Vázquez and Stalnaker, 2004, pg. 26). We see this through the high rates of fatality/ work related accidents. “The U.S. Census Bureau reported that 27.3 percent of adult Latinos have less than a ninth-grade education” (Vázquez and Stalnaker, 2004, pg. 26). Shortcomings in Latino education can have an impact on job safety. These shortcomings are commonly tied to language barriers which inhibit Latinos from receiving important safety information, especially in jobs like construction where Latinos make up a sizable population of the workforce.

Many young Hispanics today struggle with an education system that is inadequate to meet their educational needs. The American education system is designed for English speakers, only. There is a shortage of teachers who hold degrees in bilingual education; only 2.5 % of the teachers who instruct bilingual students holds a degree in bilingual education. As a result, Latino students face high rates of high school dropout and they score low on standardized tests. Latinos are also less likely than their non-Hispanic peers to attend college. Shortcomings in Latino education also contribute to overall job success. Many Latinos hold jobs in service occupations, as only “13 percent all U.S. Latinos between the ages of 16 and 24 don’t have a high school diploma or the equivalent” (Becerra, 2012, pg. 167). Even with jobs like construction, that do not require a college degree we see high levels of work related fatality/ injury. “Latino Immigrants make up a higher percentage of work-related fatalities than any other ethnic group” (Vázquez and Stalnaker, 2004, pg. 24). Shortcoming in education effect Latinos later down the road and they inhibit Latinos from reaching their fullest potential.

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