ABSTRACT
In this article, Villenas and Deyhle use the lens of Critical Race Theory (CRT) to examine Latino schooling and family education as portrayed in seven recent ethnographic studies. They argue that CRT provides a powerful tool to understand how the subordination and marginalization of people of color is created and maintained in the United States. The ethnographic studies of Latino education are filled with the stories and voices of Latino parents and youth. These stories and voices are the rich data by which a CRT lens can unveil and explain how and why “raced” children are overwhelmingly the recipients of low teacher expectations and are consequently tracked, placed in low-level classes and receive “dull and boring” curriculum. The voices of Latino parents reveal how despite the school rhetoric of parent involvement, parents are really “kept out” of schools by the negative ways in which they are treated, by insensitive bureaucratic requirements, and by the ways in which school-conceived parent involvement programs disregard Latino knowledge and cultural bases. Together these studies offer an insight into the schooling success and failure of Latino/a students within the context of the social construction of Latino/Mexicano as Other, played out in the anti-immigrant, xenophobic ambience of this country. Yet these studies also give powerful testimony to the cultural strengths and assets of Latino family education as a base by which new ways of schooling can be conceived. It is in fact when communities act as a collective, firmly rooted in their own language and culture, and gain economic and political power that families are able to make concrete changes.

INTRODUCTION: THE LENS OF CRITICAL RACE THEORY
A child born in this country to Mexican parents, who have clawed their way out of abject poverty; whose native language is Spanish; who, despite textual illiteracy and...
racism, tenaciously hold on to deep religious convictions and cultural values; whose lives center around their family and dreams of a better life for their cherished first-born child, all of their children . . . truly is not the problem. The problem . . . is educational systems which have not adapted successfully to such diversity, which have not looked into the face of such a child and seen beauty and potential, but function instead in a deficit finding mode (Carger, 1996, p. 7).

If you’re Mexican, they put you lower. If you’re White, they put you higher, right? Most of my classes I have White people, right? It’s like the teacher just looks at me and talks to me, but that’s it. But when she talks with other people, she sits down and does it right with them. The teacher will just go over it with me. If I get it, I get it. If not, I don’t. That’s why I have to get it. If you’re Mexican, they treat you sort of . . . if you’re White, they treat you right and everything (Romo and Falbo, 1996, p. 192).

So begin researchers’ ethnographic portrayals of Latino students’ and families’ experiences with the educational systems in the United States. As the ethnographies we will discuss illustrate, racism makes up the very fabric of this nation. For Latinos/as,1 racism is evidenced in their racialization as the monolithic Hispanic Other (Hidalgo, 1998); it is evidenced in their construction in the public sphere as criminal and undeserving, and in the use of language in the public rhetoric (i.e., wetback, illegals) that dehumanizes Latinos/as and serves to justify the violence against them. Racism is evidenced in the real castification (Trueba, 1993) and marginalization of Latino/Chicano communities and in the passing of legislation that perpetuates this castification even while clothed in the language of national stability, equity, fairness, and meritorious individual achievement. And, as these Latino ethnographies have shown, racism is evidenced too in the pervasive ways in which schools fail children. While considering the importance of understanding the intersectionality of oppression in the United States (i.e., race, class, gender), we wish to focus explicitly on uncovering the embeddedness of racism and the entrenchment of White privilege that lead to “colorblind”2 policies and explanations for Latino school underachievement.3 For example, though overwhelming research points to the soundness of good bilingual education programs, its likely dismantling in California has everything to do with the fortification of monolingualism and monoculturalism against a “brown” cultural and linguistic “invasion.” The lens of critical race theory (CRT)4 proves useful to understanding how the supremacy of “Whiteness” and the subordination of people of color is created and maintained in the United States.5

Crucial to overturning the normalcy and neutrality of White privilege6 are the stories by people of color whose experiential knowledge of structural racism provides the “necessary contextual contours to the seeming ‘objectivity’ of positivist perspectives” (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 11). Through the stories of “raced” peoples, we see how the daily indignities take a toll on the integrity and livelihood of people of color. Delgado (1989, in Tate IV, 1995) argues that stories are critical to creating shared memory and history, and they serve to counter the internalization of self-blame that is a result of racism. These stories by people of color are in opposition to the
“stock stories” that “construct realities in ways that legitimize power and position. Stories by people of color can counter the stories of the oppressor” (Tate IV, 1995, p. 216). We agree with Ladson-Billings’ (1998) statement that “if we look at the way that public education is currently configured, it is possible to see the ways that CRT can be a powerful explanatory tool for the sustained inequity that people of color experience” (p. 18). Indeed, these ethnographic studies of Latino education are filled with the stories and voices of Latino parents and youth. These stories and voices are the rich data by which a CRT lens can unveil and explain how and why “raced” children are overwhelmingly the recipients of low teacher expectations and are consequently tracked, placed in low-level classes and receive “dull and boring” curriculums. The voices of Latino parents reveal how, despite the school rhetoric of parent involvement, parents are really “kept out” of schools by the negative ways in which they are treated, by insensitive bureaucratic requirements, and by the ways in which school-conceived parent involvement programs disregard Latino knowledge and cultural bases.

This article will examine the following seven recent ethnographic studies of Latino family education and schooling. Carger’s *Of Borders and Dreams* follows Alejandro Juarez and his family’s unsuccessful attempt to navigate from elementary through high school with a detailed ethnographic account of growing up poor and Mexican in a crowded barrio in one of the most exciting cities in the richest country in the world (Ayers, 1996). Carger inquires into the hopes, dreams, skills, knowledge, and spirit of Alejandro and his family. However, over the five years as the story unfolds, we see the walls of racism and ignorance and the borders of literacy shattering Alejandro’s chances at school success. Moving beyond the traditional role of the researcher, Carger positions herself as Alejandro’s teacher, tutor, his maestra, his interpreter, his advocate and, in the deepest sense, his friend and compañera. This positionality allowed her to explore the contrasts and contradictions of borders and boundaries to reveal a below-the-surface human vitality that is often ignored in traditional educational research. Valdés’ *Con Respeto*, also about border-crossing, documents the attempts of 10 Mexicano families to negotiate the cultural distance between their home values and those of the schools their children attended. The idea for the book emerged from a three-year study which followed 10 children and their families (beginning at the ages of 4 and 5 years old) to investigate how bilingual language and literacy skills developed in newly arrived immigrant families. However, a focus for Valdés soon became one of understanding the Mexicano immigrant culture(s), beliefs, values, and worldviews that shaped their childrearing strategies in contrast to the schools’ definitions of successful parenting. She detailed factors inside schools, specifically how teachers’ perceptions about these children were influenced by the views they had about Mexican-origin families. Like Carger, Valdés examined the distance between schools’ blueprint (based on middle-class White mainstream norms) of successful school-involved parents and the Mexican families’ ways of caring about education. For Valdés, this inquiry led to questions of parent involvement programs which seek to change families.
Vasquez, Pease-Alvarez and Shannon's *Pushing Boundaries* describes the rich and complex sociolinguistic milieu of a Mexicano community, often invisible to the Anglo educators who control the community schools, in a book that consolidates three separate ethnographic studies spanning a period of six years. The researchers moved through sites ranging from a bilingual preschool, a bilingual classroom in an elementary school, a university research project, and the homes, streets, playgrounds and neighborhoods where the children played and the adults socialized. In attempting to show the multiple and varied language uses of a Mexicano community, in which middle-class discourses are also used by children and their families, the authors challenge the argument that home-school discontinuity explains Mexicano school failure. In *Latino High School Graduation*, Romo and Falbo conducted a four-year longitudinal study of one hundred Latino/a students designated as “at risk” by their school districts. The students were 15 years old when the study began, and the authors followed them and their families through the high school experience, collecting interviews, school and district demographics, and test data. They examined the strategies “at risk” students and their families used to successfully navigate and graduate from high school. Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco in *Transformations* use an interdisciplinary, comparative approach which includes ethnographic methods to study achievement motivation among 189 adolescents clustered into four groups: native Mexican youth in Mexico, newly arrived immigrant youth, U.S.-born Mexican youth and White American youth.

With a variety of research methods such as psychological tests, demographic data, participant observation and interviewing over a three-year period, in both Mexico and the United States, the authors' inquiry focused on the impact of immigration on the Mexicans and Mexican Americans and their self-identity. Like Romo and Falbo, the authors examined issues of adherence to home and community cultures, and concerns about poverty, school achievement, and conflict with their central research questions: “How is achievement motivation patterned in Mexican family life?”; “What are the special issues facing recently arrived immigrant youths?”; “How does the peer group influence school life?”; “What are the stresses facing U.S.-born Mexican American adolescents?”; and “How are the concerns of White American adolescents different from those of adolescents from the other groups' studies?”

Other books we review in this article take a broader, based community level of investigation. Delgado-Gaitán’s *Protean Literacy* is based on 10 years of research in a Mexicano community where she studied literacy practices in the household, school, and community. This book details the formation of a Latino parents’ group whereby parents empowered themselves to become advocates for their children in the schools. During her research, Delgado-Gaitán observed in the schools and community, conducted interviews and group meetings with parents, and joined in the conversational process she calls a “critical reflective process.” In this process, parents shared their cultural knowledge and experiences in a collective context and participated in ethnographic analysis with Delgado-Gaitán as they
seek community and school empowerment. Like Delgado-Gaitan, Trueba, Rodriguez, Zou, and Cintrón’s *Healing Multicultural America* is a study of people collectively working to change their lives. This book ethnohistorically documents the power of a Mexicano community to effectively control their economic, political, and educational paths. And, like Romo and Falbo, Trueba and his colleagues took a different route from previous educational research on Mexicano youth, which focused on failure, by founding their two-year research project on looking for success with the overarching question, “How do we explain the academic success of many Mexican and Chicano children?” In answering this question, Trueba and his colleagues study families’ and communities’ struggle for self-determination.

All of the researchers in these books used ethnographic techniques, moving in and out of people’s lives as they tried to understand their hopes, dilemmas, dreams, and struggles with educational, political, economic, and social institutions in the United States. In all of these studies the researchers committed themselves to spending long periods of time, from several years to 10 years, as they learned from the Latino families in these communities and in their schools. And all of these ethnographic studies are framed by the history of the colonization and racialization of Latino people within the United States who are indigenous to the Western hemisphere.

**RACISM AND XENOOPHOBIA: CONSTRUCTING THE IMMIGRANT OTHER**

It is 507 years that the indigenous peoples of this continent have been surviving the conquest of the Americas committed by the European colonialists. Force of arms, death work, and European diseases killed ninety-five to ninety-nine percent of the original population on this continent (Churchill, 1995). Brutal force has continued to materially and physically oppress now detribalized (Chicanos/as, Mexicanos/as, Latinos/as) and tribal indigenous peoples of these Americas. And yet the colonization of this hemisphere could not only occur through force of arms. In order for the processes of imperialism and domination to be more effective, they required the domination of the mind, of the worldviews and way of life of the people. This form of genocidal domination, Gonzalbo says, has fundamentally been educative in nature:

The occupation of the conquered territories was accomplished immediately by force of arms. However, the consolidation of the conquest depended upon the capacity to assimilate the native population . . . This task of substituting one set of cultural elements for others, the annihilation of certain concepts and mental categories, and the implantation of new schemas and forms of life was a task that was eminently educative in nature (Pilar Gonzalbo, cited in Gallegos, 1992, p. 1).

Indeed, from the very beginning of the American conquest, the task began with the burning of Mayan, Aztec, and Incan libraries and books. Lan-
guages were repressed and systematic attempts to destroy and eradicate whole cultures were colonial and then nation-state governmental policies. Schools in the United States effectively performed this task of instilling a hegemonic worldview. Indian boarding schools, for example, and the segregated Mexican schools of the Southwest (see Donato, 1997; Gonzalez, 1990), had as their agenda the replacement of indigenous culture and beliefs with hegemonic European American worldviews that justified the practice of domination as the natural order of things.

This task continues today in the education of Mexican/Latino peoples whose educational experiences this article concerns itself with. The 150th anniversary has now passed of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo which ended the North American invasion of Mexico in 1848 when one half of Mexican territory was forcibly annexed by the United States. The treaty, among other things, guaranteed the linguistic, cultural, and educational rights of the Mexican people who found themselves in conquered territories. Yet like all other treaties with indigenous peoples, this one too has been broken many times over. Today’s Latino/indigenous people who find themselves in the United States, sixty percent of whom are of Mexican origin, continue to suffer disproportionately from poverty and from low educational attainment. While Latinos are the fastest growing population and have the highest rate of labor participation among males (Diaz Soto, 1997), they continue to be among the poorest with a medium household income of $24,906 compared to an average medium national household income of $35,492. Moreover, twenty-nine percent of Latinos are in poverty, a slightly higher rate than that of African Americans. Latinos also suffer some of the highest dropout rates at thirty-five percent and, for immigrant Latino youth, at an astonishing forty-six percent. The dropout rate for U.S.-born Latinos is twice as high as the rate for Whites and half as high as the rate for African Americans (Salt Lake Tribune, October 13, 1997). While domination and suppression of Mexicans and other Latino peoples take the form of poverty and of physical violence in the United States as victims at the hands of the border patrol, the police, and anti-immigrant vigilante groups, Latinos also suffer the violence of anti-immigrant xenophobia (Crawford, 1992; Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco, 1995; Trueba, 1993) and the continued violence of their construction in the public discourse as Other—beggars, lazy, crime-ridden peoples.

When Mexican educational historian Pilar Gonzalbo talked about the “consolidation of the conquest,” she touched on one of the most insidious forms of domination and oppression—one that is rooted in language and ideology. Sampson (1993) also refers to the silent killer of domination that does not use brute force to accomplish its ends. Rather, domination is accomplished through construction of the word, “through the very frameworks by which self and other are experienced, subjectivity and self-understandings made known” (p. 3). Domination through brutal force and through construction go hand in hand as it is easier “to employ force against an other who has already been constructed as worthy of receiving our contempt or as masochistically enjoying our advance” (p. 3). Sampson
emphasizes that it is “much easier to deny subjectivity to those who have survived our abuse” (p. 3). By “our,” Sampson refers to his position and association with White male middle-class privilege as the dominant culture. Yet how powerful is the construction of the word and ideology in subordinating those who suffer the legacy of colonization? Sampson argues that the distinction between words/ideology and real practice holds for those in positions of power but not for subordinate groups:

Dominant groups have the material power to make reality fit their ideas: less dominant groups become the reality the ideas suggest. In other words, for the dominated groups, the idea is the reality. What is said and thought about them becomes the reality of their lives, because those who have the power to say and think also have the power to construct the world in that image (p. 27).

Indeed, for ethnic, racial and language “minority” families in the United States, the reality that is constructed is one of “castification” (Trueba, 1993). Trueba (1993) describes castification as “fundamentally an institutionalized way of exploiting one social group . . . thus reducing this group to the status of a lower caste that cannot enjoy the same rights and obligations possessed by the other groups” (p. 30). Trueba argues that castification is the most effective way of disempowering social groups and coexists with postcolonial democratic systems which in fact have perpetuated castification. This castification, marginalization, and oppression of subordinate groups is maintained in the power of language which in the dominant public discourse embodies the ideologies of cultural domination and racism (Bartolomé and Macedo, 1997). For Latinos/as, Bartolomé and Macedo argue that ideologically coded language and language-based racism “has had the effect of licensing institutional discrimination, whereby both documented and undocumented immigrants materially experience the loss of their dignity, the denial of their humanity, and, in many cases, outright violence . . .”(p. 225). Language such as “wetback,” “illegal aliens,” and “non-white hordes” that is used by the popular press “not only dehumanizes other cultural beings, but also serves to justify the violence perpetuated against subordinate groups” (Bartolomé and Macedo, 1997, p. 225).

Equally dangerous if not more dangerous is the “nice” language used in the immigration debate to construct Latino immigrants in the public sphere in a way that justifies cultural and material assault on their dignity and livelihood. According to Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco (1995), among the myths in the immigration debate is that immigrants and their children do not assimilate well. Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco argue that this concern is in fact greatly exaggerated. Among children of immigrants for example, English and not Spanish is the dominant language. Furthermore, as their study shows, U.S.-born children of immigrants share much with their White counterparts, including achievement motivation and attitudes about authority.
Other concerns in the immigration debate—that Latino immigrants are a drag on the economy and that they are crime-prone—create the most hysteria in the immigration debate according to Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco (1995). Citing several important studies, Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco argue that Latino immigration has greatly contributed to the growth of the states and nation. A study by the Los Angeles county attempted to determine the impact of new arrivals on the county’s economy. They found that in 1991–1992, new arrivals cost the county $2.5 billion but contributed a total of $4.3 billion to the county, state, and federal governments. Moreover, the authors argue that Latino immigrants are more often the victims of violent crime rather than the perpetrators. According to the authors, immigrant workers are victims at the hands of organized Mexican “border bandits,” U.S. police, the border patrol and of random hate acts, all of these documented and reported by human rights groups such as America Watch. These myths and rhetoric are the ideologies embodied in the discourse and language of anti-Latino, anti-immigrant xenophobia which become the reality of oppression (Bartolomé and Macedo, 1997; Sampson, 1993) when translated to real policies, practices, and laws.

Recently proposed legislation in California for example, hit immigrant women and children the hardest while not affecting the use and need of cheap male immigrant labor by U.S. businesses (Chavez, 1997). Proposition 187 passed by California voters in 1994 was aimed at undocumented women and children, denying them public schooling and the use of medical services. While the legislation was ruled unconstitutional in California courts, the effects of the campaign and rhetoric have been devastating to Latino children (both documented and undocumented) in California. The documentary film “Fear and Learning at Hoover Elementary” reveals not only the children’s fears about what the passage of the law would mean for them and their families, but also exposes how teachers in support of the law can use their authority in culturally assaultive lectures and discussions that make immigrant children feel unwanted, nondeserving and not belonging. In addition to the removal of affirmative action policies in higher education by Proposition 209, the “English for the children” campaign proposed a bill to eliminate bilingual education in California, a state where there are entire cities that speak Spanish. On June 2, 1998, Proposition 227 (otherwise known as the Unz initiative) passed, banning bilingual education in the schools. Murillo Jr. (1997) argues that dominant culture takes on the job of “disciplining the immigrant Other”—that is to teach Latino immigrants how to “behave” in White society. This “disciplining” ranges from teaching the do’s and don’ts of living in the U.S. to teaching “correct” thinking (submissiveness, assimilation, English only) about their place in U.S. society. In this manner, Latino immigrants are the recipients of the fury of a xenophobic nation, and yet their children must develop positive identities under such a cultural assault.

Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco (1995) maintain that children suffer the psychological violence that comes from the disparagement of their families and culture in the public discourse. Concluding from their data
about immigrant children’s relationships with family and peers and of their attitudes and achievement motivation, the authors powerfully state the consequences:

Immigrants want to learn and want to work hard to achieve the dream of a better tomorrow, while maintaining a separate sense of identity. However, the psychological violence, discrimination, and obstacles immigrants encounter eventually affect the identity and schooling strategies of many youths, particularly in the second generation. Many of these youth respond . . . by turning away from schools—hence the enduring high dropout rates among second- and third-generation Latino students (p. 201–202).

In the schools, the colonization of the mind is continued through the instilling of a historical amnesia that renders Latino/indigenous peoples as “immigrants,” foreigners who have no claim to the Americas, while European Americans are constructed as the natural owners and inheritors of these lands. The rich knowledge, beliefs, and worldviews of Latino and Mexican/Chicano communities are not validated, let alone taught. Ladson-Billings (1998) argues that CRT “sees the official school curriculum as a culturally specific artifact designed to maintain a White supremacist script” (p. 10). The history and perspectives of Chicanos/as and Mexicanos/as are completely left out of the curriculum, subsumed under the “immigrant” master script (Ladson-Billings, 1998). For Chicano and Mexican children, the teaching that “we are all immigrants” is a master script that works in three ways. First, it denies Chicanos/as and their Mexican relatives a claim to the Southwest (Aztlan) as their homeland and thus their indigenous or native status in the area now held as the United States. Second, it denies Spanish, a language that was protected under the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo, its status as an indigenous language of the United States (prior to the English language). Third and most insidious, the “we are all immigrants” claim also works to assert the inferiority of “brown-skinned” Latinos/as. As Ladson-Billings (1998) points out, the argument emphasizes that European immigrants assimilated and made it by pulling themselves up by their bootstraps, so then why can’t Latinos do the same. Latino culture(s), in fact, is publicly given as the reason for Latino school failure. Recently, University of Texas Austin Law School professor Lino Graglia, who is a supporter of the ruling that banned affirmative action from the UT Law School, argued publicly that “Blacks and Mexican Americans are academically competitive with whites” because they “come from cultures in which academic failure is not considered a disgrace.” Thus, in the schooling experiences of Mexican and Latino peoples, the repression continues to occur on all fronts: at the curriculum level, at the institutional structural level, and in the public framing of Mexican and Latino as problematic and deficient (see Villenas 1996, 1997).

The seven most recent ethnographic accounts of Latino/Mexicano schooling experiences give powerful testimony to the cultural strengths and assets of Latino/Mexicano family education (Carger, 1996; Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco, 1995; Valdés, 1996; Vasquez, Pease-Alvarez, and Shannon,
However, they also show that parental caring is not enough when schools are structured to fail children of color and when institutional racism and anti-immigrant xenophobia grow rampant, threatening life, liberty, and justice for millions of Latinos/as in the United States (Romo and Falbo, 1996; Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco, 1995; Trueba et al., 1993). The rhetoric of parent involvement becomes meaningless when schools are the bastions of mainstream White middle-class perspectives and value systems (Valdés, 1996; see Laureau, 1989) and where kids feel that they have to choose between family and culture and school success (Nieto, 1996). From these ethnographies of Latino education, we learned that while parental caring and researcher caring (Carger, 1996; Romo and Falbo, 1996; Valdés, 1996) are not enough to bring about change, it is in fact when the community as a collective gains economic and political power (Delgado-Gaitan, 1996; Trueba, Rodriguez, Zou and Cintrón, 1993) that families are able to demand their educational rights, claim their dignity, and construct publicly their own collective narratives and memories of who and what their communities are about. Together these studies offer an insight into the schooling success and failure of Latino/a students within the context of the social construction of Latino/Mexicano as Other, played out in the anti-immigrant xenophobic ambience and in the ideological drive to consolidate and justify European American domination via the educational enterprise (Spring, 1990). However, what shines through in these studies and what is “educative in nature” (Gonzalbo, cited in Gallegos, 1992, p. 1) for Mexicano and Latino communities is the teaching of resilience and resistance that has characterized the lives of all indigenous peoples since 1492. This is what Latino/Mexicano family education is all about.

**EDUCACION IS NOT THE SAME AS EDUCATION: TEACHING AND LEARNING IN LATINO/MEXICANO FAMILIES**

For decades, social scientists located school failure within the cultures of Mexicano/Latino families using deficit theories as explanatory models (Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco, 1995; Valdés, 1996). Indeed, many of these studies were done in the field of psychology and methodologically were quantitatively based comparative studies where Anglo children were used as comparison groups (see Valdés, 1996). The “norm” of Whiteness always positioned the cultures of Mexicans and Latinos/as as deficit while also ignoring the political-economic context. Under a CRT lens, these psychological studies are at odds with the method of privileging voice and stories as a way to understand Latino family education in its own right. However, the field of study of Latino education changed when Delgado-Gaitan (1990, 1992, 1994), Delgado-Gaitan and Trueba (1991), Suárez-Orozco (1989), and Trueba (1988, 1991), among others, led the way in the field of anthropology of education to ethnographically document Mexicano/ Latino teaching and learning as cultural strengths on their own terms. Indeed, the studies we examine here are significant in the depth and
breadth with which they capture Latino/Mexicano family educational practices. They illuminate the cultural differences in family socialization but also the multiplicity and dynamism of socialization and language use within, between, and across families and communities. In positioning Latino family socialization practices as positive, vibrant, creative, and appropriate, the authors set the stage for asserting that schools and society are ultimately accountable for Latino school achievement. CRT as an explanatory tool helps us position schools’ and larger society’s negative perceptions of cultural differences in family socialization and education within a framework of power relations and the castification of Latinos in the United States.

The families in these studies present the cultural values and beliefs of what it means to be una persona bien educada (a person with education). Valdés (1996) describes the difference succinctly: “What English speakers call “education” [italics in original] is school or book learning. What Spanish speakers call “educación” has a much broader meaning and includes both manners and moral values” (p. 125). To raise un niño bien educado (a well-educated child) requires the education of the whole being in relation to family and community, including “teaching the expectations of the roles that they would play in life and the rules of conduct that had to be followed in order to be successful in them” (Valdés, 1996, p. 125). The education of children in their responsibility to family as well as in their orientation to school achievement was accomplished through the power of consejos (narrative advice or homilies). Delgado-Gaitan (1994) has argued for “the power of narrative” and its place in the education and socialization of Latino families. Consejos are the means by which parents transmit to their children the cultural values and morals that will guide them in good behavior and in making good decisions. In many of these studies, we caught glimpses of the consejos that parents gave their children which socialized them to follow the “right” path. In Carger’s (1996) study, Alma’s primary and most important way of steering her son Alejandro on the right path was through the many and daily consejos she imparted to him. He received consejos about working hard in the house and taking his share of the household responsibility. Because Alma could not help her son in school, nonetheless, she admonished him to study hard and to behave well in class. In a violent and poverty-stricken sector of a Chicago suburb, Alejandro also received consejos about keeping out of trouble and keeping away from gangs and “bad influences.” And in a racist society where people of color are pitted against each other, Alejandro received the consejo to not be prejudiced against African Americans. When Carger went to visit Alejandro after he was beat up by a group of African American youth, Alma said to her, “We always taught our kids not to be prejudiced against African Americans . . . It breaks my heart to hear Alejandro tell me that when he sees a group of black kids at school his stomach just gets gripped with fear. I don’t want him to feel that way. Even though all this has happened, I still don’t want him to feel that way” (p. 132). These consejos were of vital importance to Alejandro’s mental and physical well-being as well as to his survival as a Mexicano in a violent and racist community.
Too, through *consejos*, parents push their children to succeed in school. Romo and Falbo’s study is filled with the *consejos* of parent after parent who advise their children on the importance of graduating from high school. Parents urged their children to finish by telling them about their own lives, hopes, and dreams, explaining “if you don’t study, you’re going to be like us” (1996, p. 108). The parents used themselves and older siblings to show what happens when one doesn’t finish high school, saying “you don’t want to be like me” or “you don’t want to follow in the footsteps of your sisters.” For many Mexicano/Latino parents without the economic resources, formal education and the social/cultural know-how of how to navigate through the schooling system, their *consejos* were often the only and most important means by which they motivated their children to graduate from high school. However, these *consejos* were dismissed, and parents were described as “not caring” by teachers and school officials.

These studies also illustrate the sometimes vastly different worldviews about not only what constitutes education or *educación* but also what counts as “success” and a “good life” among rural Mexican immigrants as is specifically revealed in childrearing practices. The fundamental differences, according to Valdés (1996), in the childrearing of these families and those practices of mainstream, middle-class Whites, involve a collective undertaking and “a fundamental contrast in values about parent-child relationships and about the particular role mothers play in their children’s lives” (p. 138). Mexican children learned to fit into the family; they learned what behaviors to tolerate of siblings, to share with them, and to not “disrupt” the family environment. In this manner, families were household-centered rather than child-centered. “Success” then for these families is rooted in familism, having to do with “the relationship between parents and children that involves notions about success, ideas about good jobs, and opinions about what is attainable at what cost” (p. 169). Valdés argues that “for most ordinary Mexican families, individual success and accomplishment are generally held in lesser esteem than are people’s abilities to maintain ties across generations and to make an honest living” (p. 170). This is readily apparent in Valdés’ conversation with Rosario, the mother of a 17-year-old young man whom she described as a “very good boy” because he was respectful and would give his summer paycheck to her in order to help out the family. By Rosario’s expression, Valdés knew that she felt sorry for her because her own 24-year-old son who was in college did not work, did not send her money, and lived far away, not taking responsibility for her and his sister. Valdés reflected, “For Rosario, success as a mother involved teaching a young male how to be responsible . . . In her book, I was either not a great success or I had been unlucky in having a son who only cared about himself” (p. 185). For Valdés then, school failure is not about uncaring parents; the issue is one of cultural clash/differences with schools expecting a blueprint of a prototypical family based on mainstream middle-class White Americans.

One way of looking at cultural differences is through identifying generalizable patterns of family education and socialization (Valdés, 1996).
Vasquez, Pease-Alvarez, and Shannon (1994), on the other hand, present the argument that families’ language socialization practices are not homogenous and that there is great diversity. In fact, sometimes these families’ practices converge with those language socialization practices of the schools. Vasquez et al. insist on considering the dynamic diversity, complexity, multiplicity, and dynamism of the effective socialization and linguistic practices within and between Mexicano families. The authors clearly argued against the cultural difference model (which implies a homogeneity of culture) and for a “recognition perspective:”

... a view that goes beyond the simple comparative stance implicit in the discontinuity perspective to capture the similarities in language use across various contexts, the convergence of multiple knowledge sources in a single context, and the uniqueness of language use practices fostered by Mexican culture. This perspective has led us to a new conceptualization of language that frames the observation of an interaction within a context of what is there, rather than what is not (Vasquez et al., 1994, p. 11).

The study shows “the linguistic and cultural flexibility and adaptability in the use of language” (Vasquez et al., p. 6). Community members sometimes use language in similar ways to that of middle-class Anglo families and then other times in ways that are clearly “Mexican.” For example, Pease-Alvarez, one of the co-authors, collected data to document the language use and socialization practices of two preschoolers and their working-class Mexican families. Working at the preschool, talking to parents, and visiting the families, Pease-Alvarez found, among other things, that the two families of the children had very different views about how their children learn. Jennifer’s parents said she learned things because of her intelligence while Nestor’s mother said he learned things because she explicitly taught him. However, “while motivated by different views about language socialization” (p. 67), adults in both families used “contingent queries,” which are questioning devices that elicit clarification and elaboration from children—thus extending their language capabilities. The authors argued that while other researchers have referred to contingent queries as a discourse device used by middle-class Anglo-American families, it is clear that these claims were not supported by Jennifer’s and Nestor’s experiences both in the home and at their Spanish bilingual preschool. Within the complex language milieu of each of these children, it was clear that “the worlds of home and school, even for language-minority children, may not always be clearly demarcated” (p. 67).

Moreover, Vasquez et al. (1994) argue strongly that not only families but also the Mexicano community is not a separate world and does not function as such. The distinctions between home, school, community, and mainstream institutions are thus not as clear-cut and delineated, but are rather part of a web of multiple interacting communities (Vasquez et al., 1994). Adults and children cross between all of these and draw on their multiple and diverse linguistic and cultural resources to function in this society. From ethnographic data collected in the homes of four families,
Vasquez and colleagues reveal how these families created and negotiated meanings and language in order to solve problems including goal-oriented conversations about how to understand text. The authors documented a scene where Rosa and her cousin and his family gathered around to try to fill out the Internal Revenue Service’s SU 32 Tax Data Form. This event showed how Rosa used all the linguistic resources and cross-cultural knowledge at their disposal to fill out the form, drawing on her English skills, her own personal experiences about withholding allowances, as well as the experiences of her cousin and his wife, who contributed to the negotiation of meaning of the text. As the authors write, “Orchestrating a three-way conversation, Rosa moves from text to knowledge-source to cousin and back again, weaving an elaborate web of meaning” (p. 126). In confronting the bureaucratic forms of U.S. institutions (i.e., income tax forms, immigration papers) which are so difficult to understand even for English speakers, the creative use of linguistic and cultural resources and know-how on the part of Latino families demonstrates their incredibly resilient response to the challenges of crossing linguistic and cultural borders in order to survive and navigate their way in U.S. society. Yet while the linguistic abilities of these families are quite complex, since they are Latino family centered, these abilities are unlikely to be valued in the schools. With a CRT lens, the ignoring of this sophisticated knowledge can be viewed as another strategy of maintaining stereotypes that perpetuate the belief that Latino families are “stupid” and “unresourceful” and to justify remedial education for their children.

In these studies, children also acted as translators and cultural brokers for their families. As these children developed their bilingual and bicultural skills, they became valuable resources to their families. They translated for doctors, teachers, and many institutional representatives beginning at a young age. In doing so, these children manipulated not only two language systems but also sophisticated and specialized knowledge. And of course, as the case of Leti shows (Vasquez et al., 1994), miscommunication in serious situations often ensues despite the child’s best efforts. Leti, for example, at her mother’s doctor appointment incorrectly translated the word “stomach” for “uterus,” thus possibly complicating the doctor’s understanding of her mother’s ailments. It is not simply a case of mother tongue translations but of the translation of specialized knowledge that children often have to confront when institutions do not provide translators even in largely bilingual communities. Thus, in their everyday use of English and Spanish and in the manipulation of two or more culturally distinct ways of knowing or knowledge bases, the bilingual children portrayed in these studies (Vasquez et al., 1994; Romo and Falbo, 1996; Carger, 1996) handled a sophisticated range of cultural and linguistic resources. However, “straddling cultures” (Anzaldúa, 1987) for these bilingual/bicultural children is a necessity. First they must keep their mother tongue in order to maintain a sense of cultural integrity and to receive the consejos (narrative teachings) from their parents and relatives along with the ancestral knowledge rooted in the mother tongue (Skutnabb-Kangas, 1995).
Second, they have to learn English in order to function and succeed in U.S.
society and to help their parents navigate through the English-speaking
world. And yet as Vasquez et al. (1994) ask, “What happens when the school
bell rings and language-minority children like those we have described
enter the world of the classroom” (p. 143)? For the most part, the linguistic
and cultural resources that bilingual children bring are suppressed and at
best ignored. In the fortification of monolingualism and monoculturalism
which upholds White privilege, to then privilege bilingualism is to privilege
bilingual families (read brown-skinned immigrants) who if honored and
respected cannot be economically, politically, and educationally marginal-
ized (Skutnabb-Kangas, 1995). The authors of these ethnographic studies,
then, seek to destroy a simplistic and racialized stereotypic view of Mexi-
cano communities. By taking the reader into the community and homes,
these authors portray Mexicano communities and families as linguistically
and culturally sophisticated, strong, functional, complex, dynamic, and
healthy, except for the racism and structural barriers they face in society,
including a lack of fair and equitable schooling.

SCHOOL CRITIQUE AND RACIALLY DEFINED
LOWERED EXPECTATIONS

The strength and vitality of the families in these ethnographies stands in
sharp contrast to the bleak experiences Latino/a youth faced in schools.
Repeatedly the school landscape was woven as a complex tapestry of subtle
and explicit racism. Lowered teachers’ expectations, based on a deficit
view of Latino cultures, assured that few youth were motivated to high
classroom performance (Valdés, 1996). The language needs of youth were
rarely met when bilingual education was viewed as an unnecessary “crutch”
(Carger, 1996). Latino/a youth were disproportionately forced to repeat
grades which increases the dropout rate while doing little to bring their
skills up to the desired standard (Romo and Falbo, 1996). Vocationally
tracked curriculum became a gateway for dropping out even though stu-
dents challenged and resisted this curriculum as both unhelpful for their
economic future and, simply, boring (Romo and Falbo, 1996). This com-
plex of institutional factors ensured school failure for all but a few Latino/a
youth.

One of the most resilient myths about Latino families is that they don’t
care about their children’s education. However, the ethnographies shatter
this stereotype. For example, the families’ commitment to educational
perseverance is reflected in the consejos and lessons derived from the sto-
rytelling about immigration and border crossings. Carger (1996) and Valdés
(1996) tell the families’ stories of their journeys to the United States. The
conditions of poverty and dismal economic opportunities in Mexico drove
Alma and Alejandro to face the horrors of border crossings through foul
rivers, mountainous hills, and electrically charged barbed wire fences, to
arrive finally to the urban poverty of U.S. cities (Carger, 1996). Every day,
many Mexican and Latino families make this difficult decision to emigrate and cross the border. However, it is precisely the lessons of the sacrifice, the commitment and loyalty to family, and the family’s drive to succeed in the U.S. that propel first-generation Latino immigrant children to tackle schooling head-on and succeed despite great odds. The Central American high school students of Suárez-Orozco’s (1989) study talked about their persistence in schooling in terms of repaying their parents for all the sacrifices they made in leaving their homeland as refugees. Suárez-Orozco argues that dedication, loyalty and commitment to family for these Central American students served as a stimulus for school success rather than a hindrance as is argued in deficit analyses of familism. Carger too, reflects on the significance of hearing Alma’s border crossing stories in understanding the resilience of the family:

Her border stories are important to me and important, I believe, to the story of her son, Alejandro. They help me to understand how she and her husband can do factory and restaurant work 10, 12, 16, even 18 hours a day, almost without stop, to ensure financial support for their children . . . [they] speak to me of family ties so strong that they can withstand the guarantee of physical pain, the possibility of loss of life, as everything is risked to visit a dying parent [in Mexico]. And they give me a better understanding, perhaps, of from where their son’s resilience emanates, of how a child can throw himself into the face of academic challenges so great that most adolescents would turn to gangs or drugs or truancy (1996, pp. 20–21).

Likewise, Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco (1995) in exploring the differences between newly arrived Mexican immigrant children and U.S.-born Mexican children reflect on the same phenomenon. They explain: “Teachers working with Latino/a immigrant students reported to us, almost unanimously, that the new arrivals are simply the best students they have ever had: appreciative, well behaved, and above all desperate to learn” (p. 5). The authors argue that “a number of studies confirm what many teachers already know: immigrants bring a special energy and optimism, perhaps to compensate for all the losses and mourning, resulting from immigration” (1995, p. 201). Thus, while immigrant Mexican/Latino children and their families are constructed in the U.S. anti-Latino, xenophobic ambience as the undeserving, criminal Other, those same children (both newly-arrived and U.S.-born) who succeed do so in spite of the psychological violence imposed on them and the lived realities of institutionalized racism. The stories from Latino/a youth are the voices of resistance to their often dehumanizing treatment in the schools.

One of the most consistent findings from these studies focused on the racially constructed treatment of Latino/a students and teachers’ negative beliefs about youth and their families. As a youth who left school sharply said, “If you’re Mexican, they put you lower. If you’re White, they put you higher, right?” (Romo and Falbo, 1996, p. 192). Romo and Falbo agreed with her. Teacher after teacher reported that student failure was rooted in youth’s culture and language, their parents who “didn’t care,” and homes
that were somewhat “unfit” to provide what youth needed for school success. Locating the problem outside of the school context gave comfort to the teachers but little hope for any institutional critique of either their expectations, pedagogy, or the limited school curriculum. However, as already discussed in the previous section, these ethnographies consistently illustrated that parents and students—at least in the beginning—do care; it is often the school that “doesn’t care.”

Valdés (1996) argues that rather than understanding the cultural differences of the students, teachers viewed them as having communication or social development problems, or simply coming from homes where the parents did not really care a great deal about education. “It is my contention that the Mexican-origin families that I followed are similar in many ways to the turn-of-the-century immigrants who were considered to be familistic, fatalistic, and otherwise unacceptable by the mainstream members of the population” (p. 40). Expressing concern about the “differences” of these children, teachers gave faint hope they might “snap out of it” and become “normal” (assimilated) after more time in schools. One teacher, speaking about a quiet, Mexicana kindergartner, expressed this deficit view clearly:

She might snap out of it, she’s got it in her, all she has to do is realize she can do it, she can snap out of it, you know. It’s just something that hasn’t clicked yet, some of the other kids click a lot earlier and they keep going and it doesn’t bother them, but I don’t think it’s something that will stay with her forever, if she just, you know, puts her mind to it (pp. 145–46).

It appears that “clicking” meant the students realized the error of maintaining their cultural and linguistic heritage by turning their backs on their homes and families.

Families were viewed as “holding back” their children. Alejandro’s teacher explained, “I think they hold him back [pause] well, unwillingly . . . I think they want the best for him but they’re unwilling [pause] or not able to help. I’m sure everything is in Spanish” (Carger, 1996, p. 86-87). Embedded in these views was the belief that assimilation is necessary for school success—youth must shed their languages and cultures to “click” into mainstream America. It was never understood that in Mexico—where these families maintained their roots—the extended family was in fact the foundation of economic success. As Valdés said, “For ordinary Mexicans, household survival—as opposed to individual success or achievement—is a key theme in the ideology of the family” (p. 178) and “Indeed, at all levels of Mexican society, it can be conjectured that these networks are social capital and the main vehicle for economic mobility” (p. 187). This stands in direct contrast to the European-American folk belief of the “rugged individual,” prevalent in school instruction and curriculum, who rises to the top by “breaking away” from the constrains of family and community. The success of the Mexicano family depended on the cooperation and support of all its members. Yet, one may ask, “What leads European-American teachers to require
assimilation of Latino children?” We argue that this requirement is part and parcel of many things, including the ethnocentric folk belief that mainstream middle-class White ways are the only “correct” ways of living. This assimilationist position of the requirements to “make it” in this country accounts for some of the actions one sees in the English-only and antibilingual education movements. And, while for some teachers the requirement of assimilation may be a defensive reaction to kids they do not understand, it also becomes a strategic way of dismissing Mexican culture and entrenching the “normalcy” of White middle-class norms.

Yet, in the often violent society surrounding youth, Latino families provided support and safety for the individual. Carger (1996) described Alejandro’s family, “Like the encircled carts of a wagon train, their strategy was to enfold him within the flock, their extended family, and ward off the dangers of the outside world” (p. 62). Alejandro’s family, like many working-class Latino families, faced racially framed opportunity structures that limited them to minimum wage and seasonal jobs. In these circumstances, the family unites and solidifies itself for survival by working 12 or 16 hours, having multiple jobs and depending on multiple wage-earners whereby some youth leave school early to find jobs. Nineteen-year-old Antonio echoes this dilemma, “There have been several persons who have had to stop studying because they have to help their parents work, because it just isn’t enough, the money that they have, to give it to them. So, because they are now older, they think it is better to help at home. They dedicate themselves to work and leave studying, rightly so, because they have to help their parents work” (Romo and Falbo, 1996, p. 132). Given the racially framed opportunity structures surrounding these families in the United States, the economic and social networks provided by maintaining the integrity of the family was a wise decision and goal (Carger 1996; Valdés, 1996; Romo & Falbo, 1996).

These ethnographies illuminate what much quantitatively and qualitatively based research in bilingual education has for decades shown—that bilingualism and good bilingual education programs are good for children (see Crawford, 1995; Cummins, 1996). Consistently, researchers have pointed out that the loss of culture and native languages often hinders, rather than enhances school success (Cummins, 1996; Deyhle, 1995; Nieto, 1996). This research is ignored in policy debates about the use of native language for school instruction. In the current debate about the schooling of non-English-speaking students, bilingual educational programs have emerged as the foe of the “Americanization” of immigrants. This public rhetoric claims that bilingual programs don’t “work” and instead hinder students’ progress in learning English (see Cummins, 1996; Diaz Soto, 1997; Donato, 1997; Moraes, 1996; Wong-Fillmore, 1992). In looking at the language programs provided to the Latino/a and Mexican students in these ethnographies, however, we see clearly that few students are ever exposed to effective bilingual education—instruction in both English and Spanish—nor enough time in language-assisted programs to effectively teach them English. Thus, the rhetoric supported against bilingualism for linguistic-minority children is racially
framed and can again be considered strategic White action in the continued oppression of Latino families. For example, the national organization U.S. English is tied to anti-immigrant groups such as FAIR (Federation for American Immigration Reform) and Population-Environment Balance which share the same mailing list and even the same donors who are linked to “race betterment” causes (Crawford, 1992).

Indeed, among school personnel there remains deep distrust of the “crutch” of instruction in Spanish, which for many children was their only language of knowing, experiencing, and expressing. Alejandro (Carger, 1996), struggling to comprehend English while he moved through school, is a vivid picture of what too often happens to these children. Even the efforts of the researcher and a teacher to provide English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction were often institutionally blocked: Teachers “forgot” to release him for ESL classes or judged their class activities as more important; the school building was closed to afterschool ESL instruction; and the principal reduced the amount of ESL instruction from three periods to 45 minutes per week. Rather than viewing Alejandro as a student who “fell through the cracks,” Carger argued the school system systematically sealed any kind of opening for him to move to the floor on an equal footing with his peers.

Rather than an effective bilingual educational program we see that the students in these studies most frequently receive limited, remedial instruction in ESL. As Carger (1996), Romo and Falbo (1996), Valdés (1996), and Vasquez et al. (1994) document, these programs operated on the premise that a limited-English-proficient student was “lacking” or defective rather than having the potential to be bilingual. This instruction did little to enhance the learning of English. With limited English skills, administrators and teachers had the “reason” to justify tracking youth into vocational paths (Carger, 1996; Romo and Falbo, 1996).

Vocational tracking was viewed as the only solution to the limited academic success exhibited by many of the high school Latino/a students. As Romo and Falbo (1996) pointed out, however, tracking both lowered student performance and increased the number of student dropouts: “Labeling these young men as ‘not college material’ and tracking them into unchallenging coursework discouraged them from trying hard and persisting in school” (p. 35). Latino parents were also distrustful of vocational education. Juan Felipe explained, “I have a big problem with this vocational thing. I see a lot of people that could have gone on and enjoyed school, but were just pushed into this vocational thing. There are some of these kids who are frustrated they aren’t going to the regular college. Too many people don’t have that self-esteem” (p. 154).

In part, the role of testing is used to validate a vocational path. In the area of assessment, Ladson-Billings (1998) argues that for critical race theorists, intelligence testing has been a movement to legitimize the framing of African American children as deficient under the guise of scientific rationalism. For Mexican American students too, IQ testing has played the same role of legitimizing their segregation and tracking into vocational and
low-level classes (Gonzalez, 1990). Romo and Falbo (1996) and Carger’s (1996) ethnographic data point to the ways in which students continue to be ability-grouped and tracked on the basis of standardized tests. As Romo and Falbo (1996) point out, “Because Mexican-origin students score lower than non-Hispanic Whites on most norm-referenced tests, they are over-represented in the lower tracks and underrepresented in the higher tracks” (p. 62). Under a CRT lens, we argue that deficit explanations on the part of teachers and school administrations are patterns connected to White strategies of maintaining privilege. As Mexican students are placed in lower tracks, White students are placed in upper tracks with the justification that this prepares each for the sorts of jobs they are capable of.

Romo and Falbo (1996), Carger (1996), and Valdés (1996) all described youth as acutely aware of the low expectations their teachers held of them and were unchallenged by the schooling experience: “Virtually none of the students who dropped out told us that they dropped out because their coursework was too difficult. Instead their coursework was at such a low level that it failed to motivate them to stay in school” (Romo and Falbo, 1996, p. 39). Over and over the voices of Latino/a youth spoke of boring and meaningless school experiences. Some blamed themselves for a lack of school success. Even though he described school as “a basic waste of time,” Martin blamed himself, “I have nothing against teachers. They were doing their jobs. It was just me not wanting to do the work or pay attention—basically, my problems” (Romo and Falbo, 1996, p. 145). With a CRT frame, we can also see how instruction, cast in a language of failure, deficit, and remediation, is viewed as an individual phenomenon (Ladson-Billings, in press). The individualization of failure is at the crux of a racist interpretation of the school achievement of students of color. As the argument goes, African Americans, Latinos/as, and Native Americans are not successful because they do not try hard enough. Failure is rooted in the individual, not in the way that society and schools are organized.

Yet some students did blame the schools: “School, it wasn’t really nothing for me. You know, it was like you go to school, you learn, you forget about it. You know, you go back to school, you learn again, and during the summer you forget everything you learned. It’s a waste of time” (Romo and Falbo, 1996, p. 74). A lack of motivation often grew out of repeated negative school experiences. Similar to other Latino youth, Martin told Romo and Falbo that his middle school English teacher told him he was worthless and would never amount to anything.

It makes me mad, it makes me feel like they think that I’m worthless or something. “Why are you even here?” you know. It just upsets me a lot. I always figured that reverse psychology never worked on me . . . they’re thinking that I’m just going to prove them wrong. But every time they tell me stuff like that it just breaks me down more than it motivates me (p. 146).

Arguing that when students are exposed to grade-level curriculum, high expectations, and concrete support, they make significant gains in achieve-
ment and self-esteem, Romo and Falbo (1996), Carger (1996), and Valdés (1996) found just the opposite experiences for the students in their studies. These researchers move the finger away from pointing at students and their families and squarely point to institutional practices that fail students.

Cognizant of the limited opportunity structure in their communities, the value of the high school diploma was often questioned by Latino/a youth. At the age of 15, seventy-six percent of the students in Romo and Falbo’s (1996) study did not feel that school was “going to do anything for them” (p. 247): “We have learned that many of our high school students dropped out because they correctly perceived that the education the schools were providing them was at such a low level that they would not be able to achieve their goal of a good life even after graduation” (p. 38). The youth in Romo and Falbo’s study expressed this concern articulately:

A lot of people say when you graduate and you get a diploma it’s going to help you find a better job and it’s going to make a difference, but it doesn’t. I don’t see where they think that. You know, these days you have to go to college and go four or five years or something to make good money. And still that’s probably not enough (p. 49).

Even if I would have had my diploma, it probably wouldn’t have helped me up there [Florida]. I would probably be working the fields for $28 per day working from eight to five. My brother got his diploma, and he is working in construction now. He’s not making very much either. We probably make the same amount, and he’s killing himself up there (p. 128).

At the fast-food job they don’t care if you graduate or not—you come to work or they get someone else to do the work (p. 73).

The weak connection between school and jobs was perceived accurately by Latino/a youth. High school dropouts competed with high school graduates for the same, low-paying jobs. Many of the youth in Romo and Falbo’s study left school as soon as they were old enough to get a job and generate income for their families. As Enrique explained, “Basically, my brother said that instead of being in school I should be working and helping out my parents” (p. 128). These youth were rewarded for their sacrifice by being treated like adults by their parents and siblings.

**Bureaucratic Glitches and Institutional Failure**

In the previous section, the ethnographers argued that teachers and administrators located the problem of student failure as, “Parents don’t care.” The data from all of the ethnographies, however, showed that parents do care, even if they are unable to directly help with schoolwork, rather it is the institution of schooling that “doesn’t care.” Parents are made to feel unwelcome in schools and are belittled and critiqued when they try to intervene on behalf of their children’s education.
I called there [school] but one of his counselors responded to me, how can I say it, very ugly, really . . . Because, she said I was at fault, that I should have hit him when he was small, that I should have smacked him or swatted him on his bottom when he was little, . . . she was wrong to have answered me that way. I was asking for help and I want him to return to school and complete his school, . . . and this is what she answered me, “Well, you are to blame for not teaching them” (Romo and Falbo, 1996, p. 188).

And as we illustrate with the stories of Alejandro (Carger, 1996) and Pedro (Romo and Falbo, 1996) in this section, even the intervention of researchers does little to change the institutional indifference towards these Latino/a youth and their families.

Carger (1996) met Alejandro at Sorrowful Mother parochial school when he was a fifth-grader in an ESL class she was coordinating under the auspices of a local college. When the teachers tried to limit his access to ESL instruction, arguing Alejandro just “didn’t try hard enough,” Carger arranged for educational testing unavailable at his school. He was a “good kid” who was a learning-disabled reader. Alejandro and Carger struggled together over the next two years to increase his reading ability. To provide a safer environment for their children, the family moved to a better neighborhood before Alejandro entered the eighth grade. The new school accepted the four younger children but refused to admit Alejandro. The principal snapped at Carger, “I’m sure you know what a controlled enrollment means. We’re an overcrowded school; I can’t fit one more eighth grader in the class. Absolutely not.” Carger persisted, “But his four siblings have been accepted here; isn’t it the policy to keep a family together?” Pointing to Alejandro’s mother he responded, “Look, you can tell her that I don’t have to take any of her children. If she wants to put four here and have the oldest bused to another school, she can. Or she can have all five bused. I don’t care. I don’t have to take any of them” (p. 3). The school he would commute to was described by the secretary: “That school is riddled with gangs. They’d eat him alive . . . He’s a handsome boy; they’ll be after him. Tell her [Alejandro’s mother] she should scar his face or something so he doesn’t look so cute” (p. 3). Phone calls and letters arguing, even begging for Alejandro’s admittance failed. Unable to afford private school, Alejandro’s only possibility was to commute back to the parochial school in his old neighborhood. He rose at 4:00 a.m. so his father could drop him off at his comadre’s (godmother’s) apartment in the same building they thought they had left behind. After a three-hour wait, Alejandro would walk into his old school. Again, teachers would not acknowledge his learning difficulties or provide any special assistance. He barely graduated from eighth grade and started high school. He was enrolled in upper division classes because as Carger was told by the school counselor, “They’re not accepting the testing done at the college so he can’t have the L.D. help” (p. 126). Facing a two-year wait for the proper psychological test, Carger argued with the principal, school board and superintendent’s staff on Alejandro’s behalf. The school’s response was to enroll Alejandro in a bilingual program, even though he had been taught all in English and had some ESL but needed
more. The director of the bilingual program argued a student had to be in Spanish classes to get ESL. “You know, he can’t have his cake and eat it too” (p. 127). Carger persisted and Alejandro was put in more appropriate classes. Reflecting on the struggle she had with simply trying to secure appropriate placement for a student was an ominous message for the possibility of parents, even though they cared deeply, to be effective given an indifferent institutional structure.

In one month, his program had been changed half a dozen times. I wondered what happens to all the other Alejandros who have no advocate to undo the bureaucratic fumblings of the Board, those with no “Maestra Christina” to turn to. No wonder dropout figures among Latino students are so high, I thought. This system is incredibly insensitive and frustrating, and I speak English and have an advanced degree behind me. Imagine how overwhelmed the Almas of the city feel in trying to contend with it (p. 128).

It was not long before Alejandro came face to face with the dangers of his neighborhood. In January he was jumped and beaten by gang members. The family and Carger wept. Insisting he enjoyed school, Alejandro persisted. About a year later Carger received a call from Alma, “We’re very frustrated and very, very sad. My husband is sick about it. But we think that at least if he goes to work instead of school, he’ll be away from those tough kids . . . You know, he’s failed so many courses, he won’t pass his second year and he’s 16 now. What do you think, Chris?” (p. 133). Horrified, Carger realized Alejandro’s mother was asking her to support his leaving school. Although frustrated, she understood the decision.

“Maybe if I spent more time helping Alejandro and less time writing his story this wouldn’t have happened,” I found myself saying. Yet deep in my heart I knew that I had always felt that I was merely plugging the proverbial hole in the dike and that the threat of flood was never really under control . . . Alejandro was not going to have a happy ending; the after-school special storyline—where the inner city kid makes it through education and hard work—was not going to be his. Alejandro gave up (p. 136).

The educational system failed Alejandro. There was very little his parents could have done. Throughout this ethnography, however, Carger described a strong and resilient young man who crossed many borders everyday: “Daily as he crosses physically through neighborhoods where his mere looks make him suspect of crimes, daily when he emerges from a home steeped in Spanish language and Mexican culture, daily as he enters schools where his background of experiences mismatches teachers’ expectations, he confronts multiple barriers to his hopes and dreams” (p. 99). He had “reasonable dreams in an unreasonable world” (p. 5).

Romo and Falbo (1996) tell a similar story about institutional indifference with Pedro. Romo met Pedro when he was 16 and not attending school. He realized he was going nowhere, “Like, I mean, last year I didn’t really go to school and the year before I only went for like half a year and that’s not going to do me any good because I’ve already seen what I can do
without an education and it’s nothing. It’s not enough money” (p. 166).
Helping Pedro return to school proved to be a difficult task. Without
enough credits in junior high the district wanted him retained instead of
moving with his age group into high school. Even after he had agreed to
attend summer school the bureaucratic path proved almost impossible.
Tracking down report cards, talking to teachers, staff, and administrators,
obtaining counselors’ recommendations, and scheduling admittance tests
consumed two months of almost daily persistent inquiry into the school
system. This in itself was evidence to support Pedro’s feeling “I guess no
one wants me” (p. 171).
Ultimately, only an alternative school accepted Pedro. This proved again
to be a stumbling block for his educational progress. Romo and Falbo
describe a bleak, uninspiring environment consisting of packaged instruc-
tion. There were no lectures, no group discussions, no demonstrations, no
hands-on experiences.
Rather than stimulate returned students and excite them about learning, this school
forced them to work entirely on their own, worksheet by worksheet, with the
occasional assistance of a teacher. Being in the alternative school was not a reward-
ing experience; in fact, it seemed designed to punish students. Yet, by returning
voluntarily to this school, the students were demonstrating their motivation to
make up for past poor performance. The alternative school became a test of their
desire to go back to school, and about half of the eighth grade students each year
Alejandro’s and Pedro’s school experiences were illustrative of many of the
Latino/a youth throughout these ethnographies. Carger (1996) and Romo
and Falbo (1996) collectively argue that the chief cause of their failure lies
within schools. All of the families wanted their sons and daughters to
succeed in school. The youth wanted high school degrees, good jobs, and
a good life, but most could not find the path through high school to fulfill
those aspirations. In a concluding reflection, Romo and Falbo speak to the
dilemma facing Latino/a students in our schools:
Many students in our study made a reasonable decision when they decided to drop
out. They were correct when they realized that school was wasting their time. They
recognized that they were gaining few marketable skills in school. They felt de-
meaned and demoralized by the way teachers and other school personnel treated
them. Getting pregnant, working dead-end jobs, and even staying home and watch-
ing TV offered more satisfying alternatives than school (p. 253).
What does it mean then to adopt a CRT lens in analyzing the education of
Latino students? It means exposing racism in the community and schools. It
means seeing how Alejandro, because of his “Latino” features, is stopped
and harassed by police, provoking his parents to worry about sending him
home from school on the public bus. It means analyzing how because of
their “Latino” features, students are automatically counseled into low-
level classes (Romo and Falbo, 1996) and denied enriching and critical
education. In essence, a CRT frame entails an analysis of the totality of racism and the interplay of the macro (anti-immigrant xenophobia, antibilingualism, anti-affirmative action, the job ceiling) and the micro (school policies and organization) in the lives of Latino children and families. And as critical race theorists assert, uncovering racism also means proposing radical action for change.

**COLLECTIVE ACTION, COMMUNITY POWER AND SELF-DETERMINATION**

Thus far, the families who have been portrayed in many of the studies seemed to be engaged in *individual* struggles against schools and other institutions. While the struggle is portrayed as collective in terms of the family unit, we get a sense that these families are left to face the structural barriers on their own. But what are the processes of empowerment and collective organizing that make social, political, and economic gains happen? The critical ethnographic studies by Delgado-Gaitan (1996) and Trueba et al. (1993) teach the lessons of collective struggle and community empowerment that give a ray of hope for real, effective changes at the local and school level. Most importantly, the communities, families, and individuals in their studies show that they can resist castification not by giving up their culture and language, but by claiming these. In collectively creating counter-hegemonic narratives of dignity and ethnic pride, these translate into a base that promotes social, cultural, and economic activities whereby immigrant children and adults are able to survive the psychological and often physical violence of an anti-immigrant xenophobic nation (Trueba et al., 1993).

From Delgado-Gaitan (1996), we get a story of the process of the “inner” empowerment of individuals and families who collectively organize as parents to help each other make sense of the schools and to make the schools work for their children. In response to Latino children’s continual underachievement, the parents of the Carpinteria School District in California formed the *Comité de Padres Latinos* (COPLA) in order to bridge the schism that existed between Latino parents who felt frustrated in their efforts to help their children with their homework and who felt unwelcome in the schools, and the teachers who believed Latino parents did not care about their children nor their schooling.

The parents turned inward to learn more about their children’s schooling and to make changes in the schools as a result of the mutual dialogue which enabled the parents to think critically about their own lives. Delgado-Gaitan asserts that “COPLA is one context in which Latino Spanish-speaking families participate and build consciousness about oppression. They see their liberation as a process of ongoing dialogue, where political awareness of the system is learned along with skills to participate in it” (p. 62). The process of dialogue that was developed was a democratic one, and many parents learned to become leaders as coordinators of COPLA com-
mittees and advocates in linking schools with parents, and in outreaching to other community organizations and agencies. COPLA committees “successfully resolved major issues, including correspondence in Spanish to Latino parents, criteria for admitting bilingual students in the Gifted and Talented Program (GATE) and English as a second language (ESL) curriculum” (p. 46). They became a well-informed parent group that was influential in hiring bilingual personnel and in fighting a city ordinance which fined households with unused cars in front of their homes. The ordinance also included penalties for households with many people. COPLA defined the ordinance as an issue of discrimination since Latinos were the target. Parents also organized activities for children such as a folkloric dance group. Delgado-Gaitan sums up the work of COPLA school committees:

Ultimately three things occurred: parents changed their view of self, they changed the way they saw each other, and they acted to change conditions. This empowerment process evolved through focused interactions which changed the individuals’ perceptions of themselves; changed the perceptions on the part of the individuals themselves; changed the perceptions on the part of the individuals toward others, and acted to alter their circumstances (1996, p. 61).

While Delgado-Gaitan details the work of a parent organization and the powerful process of self- and collective empowerment, because of the nature and historical situatedness of the community, the changes for the most part were on the parents more than on the schools. Delgado-Gaitan is aware of this in her self-critique of a reading program that taught the parents how to use books with their children. She asks whether they were suppressing the forms of interaction and storytelling that emanated from the families’ own unique experiences and forms of expression. The burden of change seemed to be put on the shoulders of the Latino families, which is what Valdés (1996) critiques in her book. But as Delgado-Gaitan emphasizes, “change occurs in a variety of ways” (p. 32). COPLA then served as a different space where new borderlands are created and “where new pedagogy occurs” (p. 32).

Trueba, Rodriguez, Zou, and Cintrón (1993) chronicle the formation of a strong Mexican community which was formally excluded from participation in the social, political, and economic spheres but whose members then developed the knowledge and skills to gain political and economic power as active participants and leaders, thus effecting real structural changes in the schools and other institutions. From Trueba et al. (1993) we learned the powerful lesson that structural changes in the schools cannot happen without pressure from the community and without prior or simultaneous gaining of power in the social, political, and economic arenas. Most importantly, the community of Woodland in Northern California did not lose their culture nor their language but rather used them as a basis for activism.

Over a period of time, the community built a Chicano middle class and also a cultural and social support base through such organizations as “El
Comité de Beneficiencia Mexicana.” Rodriguez (1993) emphasizes that participation in business and social and cultural organizations helped develop leadership skills and know-how in working with social, political, and economic institutions thus contributing to the Mexican community’s development as democratic participants in Woodland society. These activities set the stage for substantial changes in the schools. In the early 1970s during the height of Chicano activism, the Mexican American Concilio of the county pressured the Woodland school board to acknowledge discrimination against Mexican American children and to “adopt a policy for the recruitment and hiring of Chicano teachers” (Rodriguez, 1993, p. 87). This policy and the subsequent elections of two Chicanos to the city council and the school board had a profound impact on the schools. As Cintrón (1993) documents about Beamer Park Elementary, the school reaped the benefits of a politically active community. Beamer Park is a successful Spanish bilingual immersion school with Chicano/a, Latino/a, and European American faculty who are committed to the language and culture maintenance of the Latino community. Central to the success of the school is the empowerment and coming to consciousness derived from the pride that Latino/a teachers feel in being able to name themselves, their language and culture. Rodriguez (1993) emphasizes that these dynamics of change lead to the rising to power of a previously marginalized group:

The dynamics of change and reform in Woodland are a complex combination of the internal forces guiding the Mexican community to maintain their language, culture and institutions, while at the same time adapting to the American way of life, and at the same time encouraging the mainstream community to change its cultural values away from the active segregation of ethnic minorities to a democratic multicultural society that opens its ranks to all ethnic groups (p. 95).

The powerful arguments made by Trueba et al. (1993) are validated in Diaz Soto’s (1997) story of a Puerto Rican community’s struggle for just and equitable education for their children. In Diaz Soto’s ethnographic study, the process of white strategic action to maintain privilege is unveiled as the school board denies the request for a new school to be built on the overcrowded South Side (where the Puerto Rican community lives) of Steel Town, Pennsylvania. Then, led by the district superintendent, the board voted to dismantle their twenty-year award-winning bilingual program despite strong protest by the Puerto Rican community and the schools’ own recommendations. Critical race theory helps us to see how economics and race are intertwined as money is not spent on building a school for the Puerto Ricans but rather goes to build another school in the more affluent and less crowded suburbs of Steel Town. The dismantling of the bilingual program, while cloaked in the “neutral” language of what is best for kids—learning English as fast as possible, masks the real issues of racism and xenophobia. With the termination of the bilingual program, the Spanish-speaking Puerto Rican children were disbursed and bused to other schools such that the board then felt justified in not building a school on the South
Moreover, the children received a clear message that Spanish was not valued and neither were their culture and families. Diaz Soto ends her story poignantly:

At this writing South side children were bused and entered in the school district's immersion program. The newly elected school board (1994-1995) still had no language minority or minority citizens. The school superintendent continued to obtain salary increases and positive yearly reviews . . . The school board voted to demolish and rebuild a school on the West side of Steel Town. There were no new schools for the South side children (1996, p. 98).

In Diaz Soto’s story, well-educated and professional Puerto Ricans were at the front of the defense of the bilingual program. Their expertise and knowledge were discounted, however, as Latinos held no political power in Steel Town vis-à-vis positions in the school board and City Council. On the other hand, Trueba et al. (1993) point to the necessity of building a political and economic power base to bring about change. And yet what we’ve seen in the ethnographies addressed in this article is how schools function in their day to day practices to provide such a poor quality education that Latino youth have limited chances of economic mobility. This in turn denies them the political power to resist strategic White action and to effect change within the political/economic establishment (see Trueba et al., 1993).

The collective struggles portrayed in the studies by Delgado-Gaitan (1996) and Trueba et al. (1993) point to the possibilities and hope of concrete change that come from the process of conscientización (coming to consciousness), organizing and mobilizing to name inequities, and then learning about and challenging schools. Yet this change is greatest when the Latino community claims voice, creates an activist base, and gains economic and sociopolitical power to effect its challenge.

CONCLUSION

The ethnographic studies of Latino education we have addressed here all point to an educational crisis. While the Latino population today accounts for eleven percent of the total population, according to the Bureau of the Census, by the year 2020 people of color will represent almost one third (29.4%) of the U.S. population (Banks, 1997). This diversity is reflected more so in the nation’s student population. By the year 2020, youth of color will make up 45.5% of the student population. Of all of these, Latinos are the fastest growing population and will constitute one quarter of the total students who are attending school nationwide by the year 2020, up from 9.3% of the student population in 1982 (Banks, 1997). More and more school districts in rural North Carolina, Maine, Georgia, and in the wealthy ski resort town of Park City, Utah, to name a few, had never before worked with Latino students and families. These same districts are now
experiencing for the first time a growing Latino presence (see Hamann, 1997; Murillo, Jr., 1997; Villenas, 1997; Wortham, 1997). Latino school failure is not a problem that is going to go away. Schools have marginalized the largest growing population in the United States. Yet the young bilingual/bicultural youth that are portrayed in these studies come from healthy and strong families, have high aspirations for a good life, and are hard working. But as Vasquez et al. (1994) so aptly ask, what happens when these families encounter U.S. schools? These studies have documented the incessant ways in which schools fail to capitalize on the culture, knowledge, and language of these families and the ways in which Latino/a youth are systematically pushed out by being tracked into low-level classes and by receiving remedial-type instruction. The high thirty-five percent dropout rate for Latino/a students is actually misleading and belies the fact that many who do graduate do so with such low-level academic skills that a high school diploma is worthless in terms of their competitiveness in the job market (Romo and Falbo, 1996). To say the least, we need effective school practices that educate all our citizenry. Yet schools do not operate apart from societal hierarchies and institutionalized racism. While considering the differences in Latino racial/ethnic, class, gender identities, under a CRT lens an analysis of Latino schooling experiences cannot take place without addressing the racism behind the anti-immigrant, anti-Latino xenophobia of this country and the exploitation of transnational labor and migration. The ideologies and behaviors supporting racism translate into real material and culturally assaultive legislation, policies, and school practices.

The lesson we learned from these studies, however, is precisely the recognition of the strengths rooted in the uniqueness of Latino/Mexicano culture and language. As Delgado-Gaitán (1996), Trueba et al. (1993), and others have taught us, families are the starting point for surviving and effecting resistance to cultural assault, to valorizing and (re)creating a family education which stresses dignity and pride in language and culture. In effect, the goal of Latino educational success is linked to goals of self-determination, linguistic and cultural human rights, and the right to a history and education based on community-identified terms. It is through families and collective struggles that we create the counter-narratives that challenge dominant culture’s “stock stories” which legitimize the world views of White, upper-class United Statians. Schools must serve children of color in their formation as critical citizens and social activists. Ultimately, Latinos and Latinas have to engage in the battle of the word, in the battle over their own construction rather than bow to the constructions already promoted in the public rhetoric (i.e., illegal aliens, wetbacks, Hispanic, foreigner). This has always been done to some extent at the intimate household level and within community, but memories and human rights must be claimed publicly and en masse. The relationships between the researcher and the Latino/Mexicano families portrayed in these ethnographic studies are the seeds of an ongoing dialogue for this reclamation. We learned from these studies that the future of ethnographic research about Latino education must continue in the anti-assimilationist direction. While families
must empower themselves not only to learn about how U.S. schools work (Delgado-Gaitan, 1996), they must also learn how to make schools change to meet their needs without compromising their language and culture (Carger, 1996; Romo and Falbo, 1996; Trueba et al., 1993; Vasquez et al., 1994). These ethnographies put the burden of change on schools and society for failing Latino youth. For this reason, research about Latino family education and schooling is not merely research for research’s sake but it is research for social justice (Pizarro, 1998).

NOTES

1. The studies we will address in this article are based on research in Mexicano communities of the United States. “Chicano” and “Chicana” are self-identified terms which originated in the Chicano Movement of the 1960s. The term is used by people of Mexican origin and other Latinos/as who share the same political consciousness of self-determination and solidarity. We use “Latino” as a term that encompasses people of Mexican, Central American and South American origin and includes Cubans and Puerto Ricans. However, because a “We” Latinos (as a unified group) does not exist, we cannot talk about a “Latino” experience in education. Since most of the studies we address are based in traditional areas of Mexican immigration and settlement as well as Chicano/a activism, our use of the term Latino refers to those indigenous/mestizo people who live alongside Mexicans/Chicanos/as (i.e., Guatemalans and Salvadorians as opposed to Cubans) and share their same experiences as racialized and castified peoples.

2. Colorblindness refers to a common reaction to diversity where “not seeing” race or ethnicity is considered to be a fair and impartial stance. Teachers, for example, will claim that they do not “see” color, or that everyone is “purple” (see A. Thompson, 1998). Yet as Audrey Thompson points out, “not seeing color” is anything but a neutral stance. Colorblindness assumes a universal or standard way of being—usually premised on the cultural values and experiences of the dominant culture. Moreover, colorblindness is a highly political stance and is used in anti-affirmative action legal debates where not seeing color continues to favor and advantage White middle-class males who benefit from the present racial, gendered, and socio-economic hierarchies. For an insightful discussion about colorblindness in educational research, see A. Thompson’s article, “Not for the color purple: Black feminist lessons for educational caring.”

3. For Latinos/as, issues of race and ethnicity are unique in their complexity. Hidalgo (1998) argues that many Latinos/as may perceive race from a Latin American perspective and/or conflate race and ethnicity. However Latinos/as, both immigrant and U.S.-born, also learn that they are soon racialized as a monolithic group.

4. CRT has its historical genesis in the work by predesegregation African American legal scholars such as Charles Hamilton Houston and Thurgood Marshall. However CRT was born in the writings by Civil Rights lawyer and academic Derrick Bell. Among others, legal scholars Lani Guinier, Kimberlé Crenshaw and Richard Delgado have been extremely influential in the development of critical race theory. William Tate IV and Gloria Ladson-Billings have been key in bringing CRT to the field of education. See Ladson-Billings and Tate IV (1995) and Tate IV (1997).

5. See the anthologies by Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller and Thomas (Eds.), 1995; Delgado, 1995; Wang, 1997 (Ed.); and a special journal issue by Parker, Deyhle,

6. While the literature on Whiteness is too extensive to cite exhaustively, here bell hooks’ (1995) definition of White privilege or White supremacy proves useful. She defines “White supremacy” as all-pervasive and constituted in the ideologies and behaviors of White people in this society as they relate to people of color. She goes on to say that even though White people may not “embrace racism as prejudice or domination, they cannot recognize the ways their actions support and affirm the very structure of racist domination and oppression that they profess to wish to see eradicated” (hooks, 1995, p. 185).

7. Throughout these ethnographies the terms used to describe the dominant group in the United States vary from “White” to “Anglo” to “European Americans.” We include the terms the authors used. In our own arguments, we use these terms interchangeably not to describe a mere “racial” category but as labels that also encompass a standpoint of political and economic power, as well as cultural practices which provide strategic means of maintaining power.

8. According to Valdés (1996), the working-class Mexicano families’ perspective of children as contributors to the family unit contrasts with the mainstream middle-class American perspective of childrearing where children are the focus and occupy the center of attention.

9. “United Statians” is Moraes’ (1996) translation of the Latin American term Estadunidenses for people of the United States. In using this term, Moraes reclaims the term “American” to refer to all peoples living in the North and South American continents.

REFERENCES


CRITICAL RACE THEORY