

Alternative Programs for Mexican Immigrant Students: *Tan cerca* [So close]. . . .

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Mexican immigrant youth and children of Mexican immigrants enter the U.S. school system every day in nearly every state at every grade level. Increasingly there have been efforts to improve the educational programs that are offered to the Mexicans. In a society that has a complex relationship with Mexico and Mexican immigrants, this has not been easy or immediately successful. Mexicans suffer from a low status in U.S. society, one that has been constructed over time. From the Anglo rivalry with Spain in colonial times, through the Mexican War, on through exploitation of the undocumented worker, it is with impunity that Mexicans are despised in this country (Shannon & Shannon-Gutiérrez, forthcoming). Attempts to provide them and their children with an education that they deserve as much as anyone in the United States remain elusive. We have to acknowledge the attempts that are being made and continue to support those efforts with optimism. We do so here in this paper while also continuing to remain vigilant, critical, and cautious.

We examine here alternative programs that are developing in the United States for Mexican immigrant youth and children of Mexican immigrants. At the elementary level we look at what are called two-way immersion or dual-language programs. These programs involve Mexican children and Anglo children in the same program, with the same goals of bilingualism and biliteracy. At the secondary level, newcomer programs and other bridge programs are our focus. Newcomer programs provide secondary students with transitions and scaffolds to assist their integration into the school

curriculum in English, building on students' own educational experiences where they exist.

Two-Way Immersion Elementary Programs

At the elementary level, Mexican immigrant children enter U.S. schools and generally receive the same education as has been designed for monolingual English-speaking children. Otherwise, since the Bilingual Education Act of 1968, the first official federal recognition of the needs of students whose first language is not English, Mexican immigrant children could be provided with some form of bilingual education. The differences in programs revolve around how much Spanish is used for instruction and other formal school purposes and for how long in a child's educational career. Most programs are short on both counts. Distinguished programs with high success rates, however, involve as much as 50% Spanish throughout the day and the elementary grades. In any case, these bilingual programs have been designed only for the child who speaks a language other than English. Often, educators, parents, and the children themselves perceive these programs as remedial and compensatory and not value-added, enrichment bilingual programs. In these bilingual programs, Mexican immigrant children become the "other" and subject to educational and language policies that devalue and restrict them (Foucault, 1977).

Dual-language or two-way immersion programs are an increasingly popular alternative attempt to provide meaningful, successful, and equitable educational experiences for Mexican immigrant children. What distinguishes two-way immersion programs is that Anglo children in a bilingual program join the Mexican children. The

goal of the program is that both groups of children will become bilingual and biliterate. Each group is immersed in its second language for part of the day, either for instruction or for development of the second language. Each group also receives instruction in mixed groups in either language. In other words, during mixed or integrated groups, both Mexican and Anglo children learn together. A key component of the two-way programs is that there are equal numbers of Spanish and English speakers; put another way, there are equal numbers of Mexican immigrant children and Anglo children.

Two-way immersion programs have grown exponentially over the last 40 years. Today there are over 300 two-way programs in the United States, and the majority of them are at the elementary level and involve Spanish and English. These programs exist in over 24 states throughout the country, with many concentrated in California and other southwestern states. Howard, Sugarman, and Christian (2003) recently conducted a comprehensive review of research about two-way programs. Their goal was to carefully question if indeed they are successfully improving the educational experiences and outcomes of participants, particularly of Mexican immigrant children. They found, "In many respects, the literature . . . indicates that much is going well in two-way immersion programs" (p. 60). They concluded, however, that the one issue consistently emerging in all studies was that of "equity, and the tension that arises between the ideal of two-way immersion and the reality of [its] implementation in the United States, a monolingual English society" (p. 60). Furthermore, Valdés (1997) cautioned educators of a related problem, emphasizing that two-way immersion programs may create more injustices by providing Anglos with skills, such as bilingualism, that make them even more competitive compared with Mexican students. Anglo students acquire Spanish as an

additional language, one they may not even use outside of school, while Mexican children have little choice about learning English and making it at least their public language (Rodríguez, 1982). A few studies focus entirely on the inequity that can occur in two-way immersion programs (Amrein & Peña, 2000; Freeman, 1996). The inequities result from the low status of Spanish and Spanish speakers, and the high status of English and English speakers.

We concur that equity would be a problem in these programs. We agree with those who argue that education is always political, but particularly when there is a historically constructed status asymmetry between groups and maintenance of hegemony that favors the dominant group. Thus, we immediately wonder about the dynamics of an alternative educational program that involves bringing two asymmetrically related groups together for common goals. In order to examine two-way programs in this light, we have chosen to look at a case study of one two-way immersion program in Colorado, a program in which equity was not only directly addressed, but was contested among teachers, administrators, and parents.

Escuela Bilingüe Kennedy

Escuela Bilingüe Kennedy (EBK) is a two-way immersion elementary school located in a town in Colorado. The school was closed in 2003 after thriving for over 12 years due to a complex of political pressures. Local school mythology had put EBK in the pantheon of excellent bilingual programs in the state, a status only one other school shared; thus, its closing was a travesty. EBK was begun by a group of teachers who sought an innovative and promising model of bilingual education. At that time, only one

other two-way immersion program existed in the state. The teachers presented the model to parents, both Mexican immigrant and Anglo, who would eventually be the petitioners for the program in the school district.

The community in which EBK is located is a prosperous town with much community and economic activity surrounding a large state university. The Spanish speakers are by and large Mexican immigrant families. Many of the families live in a public housing project and adjacent trailer parks, which reflects their relative low economic status. Although some Mexican immigrant parents have high levels of formal education and held professional positions in Mexico, the majority do/did not. Some Mexican states are more highly represented in the community, such as Chihuahua and Michoacan, but there is no distinct pattern of immigration. This community is attractive to Mexican immigrants for the available itinerant labor, work in the service industry, and construction work. Several of the paraeducators are Mexican men and women from the community, as are the service workers at the school. This town is neither the inevitable first destination for the immigrants, nor the last. Often, when asked where they were born, children will report New Mexico, Texas, or California.

The English speakers are mainly Anglos who have relatively high levels of formal education and hold professional positions or are themselves involved in education. They live throughout the town and vicinity, some in humble living conditions and others living in relative luxury. There are some parents, in the minority, who are mixed-race couples in which one is Mexican or otherwise Latino. These couples are more likely to be bilingual than are those in which both parents are Anglo. Another minority is formed by families

headed by political activists interested in promoting social justice and exposing their children to it.

Those who live outside the community (and some insiders) describe it as a “granola” town, referring to the health and environment consciousness of many of the residents. The political climate is relatively liberal compared with other communities in the state. At the same time, the Mexicans in the community are residentially and socially segregated from both the townsfolk in general and the university in particular (Camarillo, 1979). The campus does not attract significant numbers of Latino students and does not promote itself as a university committed to the higher education of the minorities in the community, the state, or the region. Furthermore, as we will discuss in the case of secondary alternative programs, undocumented high school graduates can only attend the university as out-of-state residents, making the tuition exorbitant and out of reach for the Mexican immigrants.

Teachers who were involved in the education of parents, as part of the process of getting the school opened, say that it was somewhat easier to convince the Anglo parents of the value of the two-way program than the Mexicans. The Anglo parents saw the bilingual and biliteracy goals of the program to be added value for their children. Also, these parents expressed their desire to have their children in a school with a diverse population. The Mexican parents had to be convinced that a bilingual program with a larger portion of instruction in Spanish in the early grades would not prevent their children’s acquisition of English.

After just a few years, EBK became extremely popular and was perceived as an excellent program. Until shortly before the school closed, it always had a waiting list for English-speaking children.

The teachers at EBK, as well as most of the staff, have always been bilingual in Spanish and English. Instruction in Spanish was invariably done by native Spanish-speaking teachers and instruction in English by native English speakers. Two years before the school closed, most of the teachers who taught in Spanish were of Mexican origin. When a change in leadership occurred at the school and a new principal was hired, staffing changed dramatically.

Within its first 10 years, the school had two principals. The first was a Mexican American male who is bilingual and now heads a private two-way program. The second was a Mexican American woman, bilingual, with extensive experience as a principal. She worked well with the staff and parents, although some perceived her as having “favorites.” She decided to leave the school for a new program in another district. A search committee was formed to select a new principal. Some teachers and staff on the committee were devoted to the former principal and had clear ideas of what kind of person should replace her. They believed that only a person with certain skills, experience, and background could pick up where the former principal left off, in order to maintain the integrity of the model of two-way immersion that was established at the school and the relationship of the school community with the communities it serves. Two candidates made it to the final cut. One was Ms. García, a first-generation Mexican American bilingual woman with extensive experience in the bilingual classroom (a National Association for Bilingual Education Teacher of the Year), although this would

be her first position as a principal. The second was Ms. Baker, a European American who grew up in Costa Rica and is bilingual. This would be her second year as a principal.

The selection of Ms. Baker as principal was controversial among the staff, the parents, and the school district. Some veteran teachers and staff members wanted Ms. García to be selected. When Ms. Baker was chosen over her, supporters of Ms. García raised concerns about racism and discrimination. Some teachers believed that Ms. Baker was chosen to appease Anglo parents by having a principal who “looked” the part and was dominant in English. Members of the selection committee who had wanted Ms. García believed that due process was not followed and that their votes were ignored. Seven teachers and paraprofessionals went on to other assignments, saying that Ms. Baker’s selection was a factor in their decision to move on. All the Mexican teachers were among those who left.

Ms. Baker hired replacements for the staff through an agency that recruits teachers from abroad and sponsors them. The Mexican teachers were replaced with teachers from Peru, Spain, and Colombia and a couple of Anglo teachers fluent in Spanish, which they acquired in Spanish-speaking countries other than Mexico. With a new principal and new teachers, the EBK community tried to continue with the success that the school had experienced in the prior 10 years. It was, unfortunately, not to be.

Equity as the Central Theme for EBK’s Two-Way Program

Up until the last principal, the program at EBK was succeeding like other well-implemented two-way programs as documented by the review by Howard et al. (2003). The model for two-way immersion was clearly designed and agreed upon. The teachers

were highly qualified and considered among the best in the district. The environment at the school was one that valued Spanish and made relevant Mexican culture in the academic and social aspects of the program. Parents were equally integrated into the program and had highly positive attitudes: Indeed, the parents themselves had petitioned for the school. And, as Howard et al. found in general for two-way immersion programs, academic outcomes for all children, Mexican and Anglo, at EBK were higher than for those in other programs. However, the problem of equity continued to be the one issue that no one seemed to know how to address or even how to talk about. For example, the very teachers who established the program were concerned that the Mexican children always fell short when compared with the Anglo children in terms of academics. At the same time, there was also a concern that while the Mexican children acquired English at high levels of proficiency, the Anglo children's Spanish proficiency rarely matched that of the Mexican children's English. And while some children socialized across groups, it still seemed that you could make Mary sit next to María, but you couldn't make Mary invite María to her birthday party.

Two of the seven teachers who had left EBK in part to protest the hiring of Ms. Baker had approached Shannon to write a grant proposal that would support her as the ethnographer in residence and professional development to address equity for the staff and parents. Her role as ethnographer was to obtain a participant observer's account of how equity was being played out and to recommend changes to ensure equity. The former principal fully supported the entire project and even invited Shannon to a meeting with the new principal so that the work would continue. The new principal showed a

great deal of interest in the project and even suggested that space should be found for Shannon to have a "home" at the school. Then the school year began.

Shannon obtained permission from the school district and got human subjects approval. Just as the school year began, she submitted letters of consent to be sent to the parents in both English and Spanish. At that point, however, Shannon received a call from the principal, who communicated that she no longer supported the project. She explained that among her concerns was that with such a large number of new teachers, she could not expect them to agree to being observed and that she, in fact, would not allow Shannon to observe them.

Shannon did not submit the proposal. The tension over the hiring of this principal was building dramatically every day, and she felt it was not a good idea to become a part of the problem (at least in the eyes of the principal herself). As a compromise, the principal asked for Shannon's help with improving parental involvement and agreed to have her observe at School Improvement Team (SIT) meetings of the parents. Because of Shannon's prior involvement in issues of equity and parent involvement and the remaining teachers' concerns about equity in light of the new principal, Shannon agreed to the compromise.

In previous years, the Mexican and Anglo parents came together for SIT meetings that were carried out bilingually. However, for the first half of the school year, the Mexican parents were involved in a specially funded project meant solely for them, FAST (Families and School Together), which was highly successful in getting a large number of parents involved. It also meant, however, that the Mexican parents and the

Anglo parents were not meeting together. The SIT meetings took place on the same night as the FAST ones.

Shannon recommended that the principal meet with FAST at the group's last gathering and invite members to the SIT meeting that followed. The FAST parents met in the library and had brought a potluck to share. They sat at the tables and socialized among themselves while the principal invited them to the SIT meeting. She distributed a copy of the agenda in Spanish and reminded them that the meeting would be bilingual.

Most of the Mexican parents stayed in the library for the SIT meeting. As the Anglo parents showed up, they immediately set about reconfiguring the room, placing chairs around in a circle, without addressing the Mexican parents who were seated in the chairs. The tone of the FAST meeting was rapidly transformed from informal and friendly to formal and businesslike for the SIT meeting. The meeting went well, although it was clear that the Anglo parents dominated the tone and content of the meeting.

SIT continued to meet monthly with both Mexican and Anglo parents. However, the Anglo dominance increased while the number of Mexicans in attendance decreased, along with their input and participation. By the last meeting of the school year, only two Mexican parents were present, with 18 Anglo parents and teachers (not all of whom were Anglo). The two Mexican parents were SIT's co-chairs, as it had been determined that SIT should have one Spanish-speaking chair and one English-speaking chair. The former was a Spanish-speaking Mexican father, and the latter was a bilingual Mexican mother.

The last meeting was held in a fourth-grade classroom, with the children's chairs set in the now-expected circle. The discussion was about spending funds to erect a marquee outside the school, facing a busy street, to advertise the school and give it more

prominence. The school district has an open enrollment policy, so advertising seemed like a good strategy to increase enrollment at EBK. At one point in the discussion, an Anglo mother interrupted with a complaint that procedural rules were not being followed at the meeting. She insisted that these meetings were serious, and thus formal rules needed to be followed. She directed her complaint to the bilingual co-chair, saying that she needed to state a motion and put it to a vote. The co-chair did not know how to do that, so the Anglo mother, in a loud and demanding voice, asked the co-chair to repeat after her. The co-chair, humiliated and confused, got up and excused herself from the meeting. At that point, the other co-chair began to discuss the problem, arguing that in Mexico, parents did not meet with formal rules. A heated discussion was looming, but the principal interceded and said it was time to separate the groups for their discussion of the agenda items in their respective languages and then convene to make decisions. When teachers and parents alike protested that they should address the problem, the principal said it was irrelevant.

Shannon stayed with the Anglo parents. They continued with agenda items and then strayed into a discussion about how to improve relations between themselves and the Mexican parents. One mother offered a plan to have a buddy system whereby families could get together outside of school. She said that each Anglo family could invite a Mexican family over for dinner, and the Mexican family could reciprocate. Then she hesitated and explained that the Mexican families might be intimidated by the Anglo homes and feel ashamed about their own. The Anglos decided the buddy system was not a good idea. At that point, the mother who had insisted on following the rules interrupted and asked, "Am I going to be the only asshole here? Is no one going to say anything

about how these meetings are run? Why do we have a co-chair that is supposed to be bilingual not understand me?" Again, the principal shifted the discussion to the agenda.

Apparently, as reported to Shannon by the bilingual teachers and Mexican parents, the Spanish discussion among the Mexican parents was all about the incident. They repeated what Shannon had heard before in another attempt at parent involvement, "They use the agenda to silence me" (Shannon & Latimer, 1996). Fortunately, this was one of the last SIT meetings of the year.

By the following year, tensions at EBK were at their peak, and the principal failed to provide adequate leadership as the school became more divisive. The dividing line was between Mexican and anything but Mexican (Acuña, 1996). The principal fueled that divide by targeting Mexicans and Mexican sympathizers on her staff. She accused one Mexican teacher of not paying equal attention to the Anglo children in her first-grade class. Animosity between Mexicans and Mexican sympathizers and other teachers and paraeducators grew daily.

In order to address the problems, a group of Mexicans and Mexican sympathizers applied for a grant to develop a graduate course on equity. The principal continued to be an enormous obstacle to the teachers' quest for the examination and the insurance of equity. She believed that equity was not a problem and that political issues had no place in the school. With the exception of a few teachers, no one seemed willing to acknowledge that equity was a problem. As time progressed, however, the only way one could say that no problem with equity existed at the school was to call it something else.

In the "equity class," participants read the literature on the topic and had local experts come to discuss their work with them. Among the teachers were three Mexican

women, five Anglo women, a woman from Venezuela, and a Mexican American woman. Several Mexican paraeducators sat in on most discussions.

Ms. Baker permitted the class to take place after staff meetings with the idea that other teachers could sit in on the discussions, something that occurred only when the guest speaker was a popular local expert. The teachers kept journals and wrote reflections on the readings. Discussions eventually spilled over into each of the teachers' lives. Equity was a topic that they each needed to talk about, as if it were a matter of life and death.

Equity came to be defined as keeping White privilege in check and elevating the status of Mexicans and Spanish. One Mexican teacher wrote about his feelings about racism targeted at Mexicans:

Durante toda mi vida dentro de la educación en los Estados Unidos, he luchado contra mi misma para poder demostrar que deseo que cada uno de nuestros hijos tenga la oportunidad de recibir la mejor educación que se le pueda dar. Para esto YO se, entiendo y comprendo que necesitamos líderes para seguir luchando en contra de todos los prejuicios sociales que existen en contra del Mexicano.

[All my life while being part of the education system in the United States, I have struggled, even with myself, to prove that I want for every one of our children to have the opportunity to receive the best education possible. In order to accomplish this, I believe that we need leaders who will keep fighting against the discrimination and social injustice that exist against the Mexican people.]

This teacher recognized that strong leadership would be necessary to combat the ritual and pervasive racism that Mexicans suffer in this community. What made the problem most worrisome was that the teachers recognized that racism was practiced at the school. It was becoming increasingly clear that those who thought that racism wasn't a problem and those, like the principal, who thought politics had no place in the school

were either exercising their White privilege or practicing racism. As long as they could polarize the issue with "us" and "them," with "them" being Mexicans or Mexican sympathizers, they could ignore the problem.

Associated with racism targeted at Mexicans is the hegemony of English. Among the teachers who took the equity class was the subject of a case study of a bilingual classroom in which she resisted the hegemony of English (Shannon, 1995). The concept was not new to anyone in the class. They understood that simply providing instruction in Spanish was a form of resistance. Above all, they knew that having English-dominant students acquire Spanish was powerful form of resistance. What concerned them was that many of the English-dominant students fell short of the level of proficiency in Spanish that the Spanish-dominant students achieved in English. The Anglos were exploiting the hegemony of English while the Mexicans were surrendering to it (Shannon & Shannon-Gutiérrez, forthcoming).

Among the books that they read was precisely about White privilege: Gary Howard's *We Can't Teach What We Don't Know: White Teachers, Multicultural Schools*.

One young Anglo woman wrote:

Being born White brings with it privilege and burden. While some want to only participate in the privilege and to ignore the burden, I find myself bogged down in burden. It is hard not to experience much guilt and regret at having been born into a group whose status and privilege is granted at the expense of others. I recognize my privilege, but am often unsure how to use it to fight the battle for equity.

The White privilege problem was not only about Anglo teachers; it was about Anglo parents. The course participants began to see the dynamics of having one group of parents who could exercise White privilege together in a school with Mexican parents who were marginalized and silenced. One of the gravest issues centered on the state's

standardized testing program, the Colorado Student Assessment Program (CSAP).

The CSAP was instituted by law to hold schools accountable for student achievement by, paradoxically, testing students. The results of the test are used to rate schools on report cards that become public knowledge. Not only is the school rated, it is ranked against 10 nearby schools. Parents have access to this information and can, in an open enrollment district (such as the one that includes EBK), choose a school based on its "grade." The CSAP was not designed to measure what students in two-way immersion programs know. The tests are only appropriate for English-monolingual students who receive all their instruction in English. EBK students receive half their instruction in each language, although more in Spanish in the primary grades. Naturally, these students' average scores will be lower than those for English-only students at English-only schools. Although Anglo parents reported good reasons to have their children in a two-way program, they might reconsider if they believe the CSAP report card grade for the school is important and an indicator of the quality of the program. Anglo parents indeed began to demonstrate more than usual concern over their children's achievement in the classroom and never about how well their children were acquiring Spanish, interacting with Mexican students, or using Spanish outside of school. If those things were not of concern to these parents, they may very well opt for a different school whose outcomes included high CSAP scores. The following excerpt from a note to a third-grade teacher illustrates this issue well:

Ms. T,

I talked to Ms. Baker about the info I need. She gave me some of it, e.g., a little about the writing rubrics and how you do them and what they mean. These evaluations seem comprehensive and informative in terms of identifying areas where she needs to improve. It is still somewhat unclear

to me how Leo is doing in writing compared to what is expected of a third grader, i.e., is he progressing normally, a little behind or performing strongly? I need to have that kind of information—both how he is doing compared with the 3rd grade "norm" (not just his class, but 3rd graders everywhere) AND how he is doing compared with how her teacher (you, presumably) think he should/could be doing with his abilities. I see how he is doing at home in reading and writing, but this does not help me evaluate whether he is where he ought to be and if there are areas where he should/could do extra work at home to improve.

I need this info from you, not just 2 times during the year, but frequently. I would like to know the results of the writing rubrics, reading evaluations and math evaluations on an ongoing basis. There must be some way to make this information available without needing to spend a lot of your time. Perhaps you could let parents know about the ongoing evaluation methodologies, what types of results come out of it and how they can tap into that information. Let me emphasize that I need and expect to have this information on an ongoing basis.

Furthermore, if Anglo parents start to choose high-CSAP schools, then Mexican parents may do the same, although it is less likely that Mexican parents would put such an emphasis on one measure that is not appropriate for their children. For example, one father expressed just that: "*Es natural que nuestros hijos no sacan calificaciones muy altas porque están aprendiendo en dos idiomas* [It's normal for our children not to obtain the best grades because they are learning in two languages]."

In our society, we expect schools to do for our children what our society fails to do. Anglos choose two-way immersion schools so that their children may become bilingual and will be exposed to children of "other" cultures. With our historical relationship with Mexico, present-day ambivalence to their presence in every corner of the country, and overt racism toward Mexicans, it is a wonder why Anglos chose two-way Spanish immersion programs for their children.

The EBK program is perhaps an extreme example of the coming together of two asymmetrically related groups. It should also be noted that this is 800 miles north of the

border. The Alicia Chacon International School in El Paso, Texas, reports very little racial divide (Calderón & Minaya-Rowe, 2003), primarily due to its school population that is overwhelmingly Mexican or Mexican American. According to the Texas Education Agency's *2002-03 Academic Excellence Indicator System Campus Reports* (2003), Chacon had 98.5% of its student population listed under the term "Hispanic." It should also be noted that in another university town in Colorado, a two-way immersion program thrives with no reports of similar divisiveness as at EBK, although no study focusing on equity has been done there.

We are not suggesting that two-way immersion programs be dismantled; rather, we urge those who advocate and promote such programs to be clear about the potential dangers of bringing together members of an oppressed group with members of a privileged group. We should view two-way immersion programs as great opportunities to teach about social justice. Furthermore, more needs to be done in these programs to elevate Spanish and promote bilingualism for all students, for instance, by making proficiency in Spanish more directly linked to high stakes--as English is. Finally, the social engineering experiment that two-way programs can turn out to be needs to be implemented with care and caution about pervasive racism against Mexicans, hegemony of English, and the exercise of White privilege in our society.

Alternative Secondary Programs for Adolescent and Adult Immigrant Students

For immigrant adolescent youth, "doing school" in the host country means not only handling academic content in a language they are still learning, but also negotiating new value systems, peer and adult interactions, and the often difficult transitions of

adolescence (Lucas, 1996). While the dropout rate in the United States for immigrant Mexican 16- to 19-year-olds is almost 40%, or approximately double that of Mexican immigrants educated in U.S. schools, this figure is comparable to that estimated for students in Mexico who leave secondary school before completing it.¹ Thus, these figures and other evidence suggest that the phenomenon of high school "dropouts" (also *el abandono, la deserción escolar, or la atrición*) among older immigrant or transnational youth is a complex one that must be studied through the contexts not only of U.S. but also Mexican schools and societies.

Research has illuminated a range of issues informing the underachievement characteristic of this population of students in the United States, such as the role of pre-immigration histories and prior academic and literacy experiences (Perlmann, 1988, 1990; Cisneros & Leone, 1990; Troike, 1978; Schmidt, 2003); cultural, social, political, economic, and other factors relating to linguistic minorities and language conflicts (Skuttnabb-Kangas, 1979; Crawford, 2000; Padilla, 2004); issues of class, linguistic, and ethnic identity (e.g., Ogbu & Matute-Bianchi, 1986); and conflicting family and work commitments (e.g., Valdés, 1996). Recent conceptualizations of the lives and livelihoods of immigrant youth from transnational and binational perspectives (Brittain, 2004; Yurén, de la Cruz, & Cruz, 2004; Sánchez & Sánchez, 2004) force questions about the place school holds in the lives of these youth and young adults and about the relevance, particularly in secondary schools, of decontextualized academic content and fragmented schedules and structures. In the United States, Mexican newcomer youth may also be more sensitive than their younger counterparts to a climate that is hostile toward the use and users of languages other than English, one in which the status of Spanish and its

legitimacy are questioned, and where a covert racism is endemic (Shannon & Shannon-Gutiérrez, forthcoming; Reese, 2004).

Even when academically able and ambitious newcomer students do well, they may see the doors to higher education as closed to them because of perceived financial, language, academic, and familial barriers.

“Where will I get the money?” they ask. “My ACT scores aren’t high enough” or “My English isn’t good enough” are commonly voiced concerns. “I need to work to help my mom,” reflects the pressure students often feel to help support their families. ... Frequently, neither students nor their parents understand the system of U.S. higher education or how to navigate it. (Brancard, 2002, p. 1)

Besides these very real perceptions, youth who are children of undocumented workers will find their access to higher education--in Colorado and most other states that deny the children of undocumented workers resident tuition--even more severely limited.²

A recent report by the Brookings Institution (Singer, 2004) identified Denver as a "re-emerging gateway" for families from Latin America; Denver ranks sixth among U.S. metropolitan areas in percentage of growth of immigrants during the 1990s. The high school dropout rate of almost 40% for Hispanics in Denver likely reflects the plight of older immigrants who arrive as newcomers to U.S. high schools and do not fare well.

In the face of these and other serious challenges for English language learners in general, and Mexican students in particular, recent structuring efforts in secondary school programs are aimed at reversing of the trend of immigrant student underachievement. We report below on three initiatives in the Denver metropolitan area (Thomas-Ruzic, 2003; Brancard, 2002, 2003; Miller, 2004); these include *newcomer*, *bridge-to-college*, and *alternative high school* programs. Each is connected, directly or indirectly, with efforts at

the School of Education, University of Colorado at Denver. We first describe each program in terms of selected program structures and processes. These include placement, advising, and scheduling procedures; content-based (sheltered) instruction; the role and uses of Spanish to support instruction; and articulation between and among stakeholding partners (e.g., among school counselors, parents, and students, program staffs, and high schools and community colleges). Following each description, we report some promising outcomes of the programs and implications for future efforts.

The picture emerging from our work evokes a metaphor of the bridge: programs that serve as bridges between home and school; between various school programs, entities, and staff to work on behalf of the students; and between students' secondary experiences and tertiary education--whether vocational or academic. Through (re)structuring points of articulation, communication, and access for students in partnership programs, as well as their teachers, counselors, and parents, there is evidence that programs, however small, can make important differences for students in spite of the unfavorable social and political conditions that persist in the broader frame of their experiences.

Newcomer Program, McClain High School: Jefferson County Schools, Colorado³

Launched in 2002, the Newcomer Program was one large metro-area school district's response to the challenge of supporting its beginning English language learners (ELLs), secondary students distributed across five "low-incidence" district high schools. This program's areas of focus included acculturating students to school in the United States, supporting their English Language Development (ELD) and content instruction,

and articulating between and among the students' home high schools as well as adult (English as a Second Language [ESL] and General Educational Development [GED]) programs. District data had shown that beginning-level students, isolated in large schools and lacking access to curriculum, had demonstrated little growth in their English-language proficiency and were at high risk for dropping out of their schools. A newcomer structure was selected over other options.⁴

Thus, five “low-incidence” high schools send all their students who speak a language other than English in the home to the central assessment center to take the Idea Proficiency Test. Spanish-speaking students are also given the Spanish version of the Idea Proficiency Test, and some students are given a nonverbal math assessment. Students who score as a “non-English speaker, reader, and writer” qualify to attend the Newcomer Program, which is housed in McLain High School. Students from the five high schools arrive by bus for 3 hours of morning classes (7:30 to 10:30 a.m.) and return to their respective home high schools to attend afternoon classes at their home school. Newcomer students take classes and earn credits toward graduation for their courses in English language arts; these are based on district language arts standards. The students also receive a modified U.S. history credit for the social studies classes. Classes in the Newcomer Program are taught by ESL-endorsed, bilingual teachers. Back at their home schools, students typically take math and electives for their first year, and those with a high level of literacy in their native language may also take science.

Since the start of the Newcomer Program, students' average yearly growth in English, as measured by the Idea Proficiency Test and other formal and informal assessments, has increased, and their grades in all content areas taken at their home

school have improved. Students transitioning into full-day programs the following year have shown a higher passing rate in all of their classes. The articulation between the newcomer program and the five home high schools has helped the latter become more responsive to students' affective needs and to engaging meaningfully with parents, two elements we believe are crucial to students' ultimate success in completing school. For example, we have seen an increase in requests for Spanish-speaking translators for families at the home schools. Also, the counselors at the home schools have received training in scheduling students into appropriate classes for their level of language acquisition. At one of the home high schools with only two English language learners, the counselor is in weekly dialogue with the ESL resource teacher (also a Newcomer Program instructor) about the progress and appropriate course selection for one Mexican American youth. Such conversations among resource and teaching staff and counselors on behalf of students were once nonexistent. Related efforts in Jefferson County have addressed the relevant training needs of school counselors and other school staff.

Another type of articulation, with the adult programs housed at McLain High School, has helped to ease transitions for newcomer students to relevant and meaningful alternative programs. For example, one 18-year-old Mexican American youth moved from the Newcomer Program to the adult program, where he is now reading at a sixth-grade level and able to pursue his high school diploma through one of a variety of nontraditional programs available to students. Another Newcomer Program student, an adopted 15-year-old boy from Mexico, is taking an online pre-algebra class to catch up on his math credits, and a teacher at McLain High School has also offered to tutor him. Yet another Mexican American student had a baby when she was in ninth grade. She

currently attends the program for pregnant teens offered at McLain, and she is earning her English credit through the Newcomer Program. This student is on track to graduate on time.

We view newcomer students' successes primarily from the perspective of the Newcomer Program as a bridge or scaffold. The program attends not only to students' academic needs but also their affective needs. For these and many other students, an atmosphere of caring and high expectations is requisite to their engagement in school. In the Newcomer Program, the enhanced communication and articulation among the various players and their points of contact with the students (i.e., parents, counselors, content teachers, and other programs that articulate with the high schools) have provided the scaffolds and coherence that help students navigate high school.

Partnership Program for Immigrant High School Students: Bridge-to-College⁵

The ESL Program, Community College of Denver (CCD), and English Language Acquisition (ELA) Program, Arts and Cultural Affairs High School, Manual Educational Complex, Denver Public Schools partnership began in 2000, when high school ELA teachers and counselors identified problems in advising ELA students about their options in higher education. Many students and some faculty were convinced that unless students' English-language skills were at a college level in their senior year, higher education was not an option. The goals of the partnership are improving ELA students' English academic writing skills and helping students to see higher education as an option.

Students in advanced levels of the ELA program are given the opportunity to take one of CCD's ESL composition courses through the state's Post-Secondary Options

Program, which allows high school juniors and seniors to take college classes while they are in high school. The class is offered in the spring semester at the high school and is team-taught by a CCD faculty member and a high school ELA teacher. Learning activities include drafting and revising assignments, using networked computers to participate in e-mail discussions and access Web-based support materials.

Students also engage in electronic and face-to-face discussions with CCD faculty members about their educational and career goals. They visit the campus, meet with educational case managers about the majors they have identified, and take the Basic Skills Assessment at the college to identify which developmental classes they may need to take in their first semester at college. Before graduation, senior students have the opportunity to register for fall semester classes at CCD and make their first-semester college schedule in one or more one-on-one advising sessions with the faculty members.

Eight of the seniors and juniors (12th- and 11th-grade high school students) enrolled in the Spring 2002 class also enrolled the following Fall 2003 and/or Spring 2004 semesters at CCD. The college instructor who had taught their high school class was in regular contact with these students during their transition to discuss their progress, help them access tutoring services, resolve financial aid problems, and plan for future semesters. E-mail remained an important means of communication between teachers and students, with students frequently initiating contact.

The structure and processes above enable what is likely the most important element in the program for students, that is, building a relationship with a college faculty member. The faculty member becomes their point of contact, the person they can see when they have doubts and problems. The campus visits and the class provide an

introduction to the physical and academic environment they will encounter, and otherwise help students envision themselves and identify as future college students.

In the college encounters, students report being able to identify themselves with the other, diverse students on campus through structured visits. In follow-up interviews, students' comments suggested the importance for them to see the campus as a place where there were other students of color and non-native speakers of English. Reporting back on her interview of two college students, one student noted, "Yeah, people like me they still learning English. Then I think if they can go, I can go too. That's what I said. If they can, I can."

As with students in the Newcomer Program above, we see the successes of the high school-community college partnership program from the perspective of a bridge or scaffold. Meaningful face-to-face encounters with college instructors and immigrant college students in the context of the community college itself help minority high school students to envision themselves in higher education. Seeing where school can lead them, these students are likely able to make more sense of their high school experiences.

The New America High School

The New America High School (NAHS) is a proposed charter high school for immigrant students in Adams County Public School District 14.⁶ Adams County is one of several counties comprising the Denver metropolitan area; it reports that 68% of the 6,702 students in the district identify themselves as Hispanic. In this section, we provide an overview of the proposed charter school, designed to serve older immigrant students.

The NAHS represents an innovative approach to serving immigrant and newcomer youth and adults who are 16 to 21 years old and learning English. Characteristically, this population faces competing demands of school, work, and family. Despite the motivation and abilities these students may have, traditional high school structures and demands often force them to choose between continuing their education and meeting family and economic responsibilities.

The mission of the school includes providing access to opportunity through increased proficiency in English and cultural awareness; issuing high school diplomas; and providing a bridge to other public high schools, GED programs, community colleges, and traditional ESL programs. The program will serve from 150 to 400 students, whose educational, social, and cultural issues will be the very core of the curriculum and activities--not at the margins. Students, parents, and community members are included in school decision making; among other duties, they will help to organize structured experiences off campus. These activities give high school students an opportunity to visit colleges, businesses, and community agencies. The school day, organized around a flexible schedule from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m., accommodates students' work and family commitments.

The program will be developed as a partner school of the School of Education at the University of Colorado at Denver, under the guidelines of the National Network for Educational Renewal. The network is a consortium of schools and universities that work within formal partnerships to improve educational practice through a process of renewal in four areas: teacher education, continuing professional development, action research, and methods and materials development. Under this model, Thomas-Ruzic will be site

professor in this partnership effort, working on site in all the above areas in addition to teaching. As a “total learning community,” everyone--adult and youth learners, teachers and staff, parents, and other stakeholders in the community--is actively engaged in the important decisions of the school. Communities will consist of 45 students with a team of teachers, teaching interns, and community members. This structure encourages group members to use each other as resources for learning and social support. NAHS students are at risk of dropping out or drifting away, owing to problems at home and pressures to make a living. Having a stable base community at school makes staying in school more likely. Groups will retain their composition throughout the learner's school experience, with their advising teacher continuing to serve as advisor to the group as a whole and to individual students on a regular basis.

Scheduling will support instruction based on in-depth, active investigation of subjects through project-based learning. Through engagement with each other and with the world in an authentic way, students will not only gain content subject knowledge, but also use English and other academic skills they will need for daily and work life while developing closer relationships with fellow students and teachers.

NAHS views a student's first language ability as an asset. Bilingualism is an increasingly valued skill for employees, and the NAHS philosophy is to encourage and increase fluency in the student's first language. One of the ways in which bilingualism and biliteracy will be fostered is through the group structure. Each group will contain at least two speakers of a language. Students will be given time daily to work together in their common first language to discuss what they have learned and help one another understand it. Community members and parents from the students' first language

community will be recruited to serve as mentors to those students, as well as provide a closer link the community and reinforcing the links between school, community, and home. Formative assessments--authentic and alternative assessments in addition to formal assessments--will inform instruction and guide remediation.

At NAHS, immigrant students are at the center rather than on the margins of the school's structure, identity, and mission. Through alternative learning structures, such as communities focused on project-based learning, it is anticipated that students will be able to succeed in an environment that provides coherence, relevance, and an atmosphere of caring.

The early findings reported on here about alternative programs for adolescent immigrants suggest that the key to programs serving this age group is structures that enable and enhance the *communication* among the various players involved in young people's educational experience. These players include the teachers, counselors or advisors, and administrators--both in the students' newcomer or home school program *and* in articulating programs such as community colleges or adult education centers--and, importantly, the students themselves and their parents. An emergent theme in our work is that newcomer and partner programs are bridges for students, bridging school and home, their first and second languages, and their emerging transcultural, bicultural identities. To be able to make sense of school in the new country, and to understand "*what's in it for them,*" most immigrant youth need not only academic support and appropriate instructional programs but also a caring environment (Valenzuela, 1999).

Implications from our studies are that it will be important to enhance further the "bridge" structures in place. These may include the following:

1. Enhanced program offerings and interactions with students and teachers at community colleges, perhaps in summer;
2. Continuing efforts to provide clear and accessible information to parents, as well as engage parents' participation, so that they better understand the options open to their children;
3. Ongoing (academic) literacy and technology support; and, perhaps most important,
4. Communication and articulation between and among educators and programs that figure in the youths' educational experiences. (Brancard, 2002)

Reports from Stanford University's Bridge Project (Kirst, Venezia, & Antonio, 2004), aimed at building stronger K-16 transitions, has a similar list of recommended structures. (The Bridge Project also emphasized the need for increased information and awareness about, as well as research into, placement exams and their relationship with high school exit standards, an area not discussed in the present paper.)

It would be misguided to suggest that alternative school programs alone are the answer to what we know is not only a schools or education issue, but a binational, and in many respects transnational, phenomenon--social, historical, economic, and political. That said, the successes of schools such as those reported on here do suggest the immense potential of immigrant children and youth when they are served by programs designed around them and their educational and affective needs.

Conclusions

The programs specifically designed for Mexican immigrant children at the elementary level and youth at the secondary level that we have described here show promise and provide some sense of caution. Certainly at the elementary level, with two-way immersion programs, the specter of racism seems inevitable because of the bringing together of asymmetrically related partners. At the same time, it is an opportunity to address issues of equity in real time. It is not clear that sufficient work has been done to date to see how that can be done and done effectively. The program discussed here is certainly an extreme case, but it serves to show the problems in high relief. And it reminds us of Valdés's warning of the potential dangers of two-way programs. If Anglo children continue to benefit more from such programs than the Mexican children, then it seems imperative that such programs be redesigned to end inequity.

In contrast with the two-way bilingual program discussed, the three secondary programs described serve a range of linguistically diverse students, and not Mexican students alone, although our focus has been on how the programs have served the latter. The programs are characterized by nurturing and caring environments that have centered on the particular needs of these students, rather than being geared toward the dominant group. Hence, they are in themselves efforts at equity for Mexican as well as other diverse youth and their families.

Perhaps the way to achieve equity when providing immigrant children and youth alternative and promising programs is to ensure that the primary participants are in fact the diverse students and parents for whom the programs are designed—and to delimit Anglo participation accordingly. On a more promising note, we suggest that we should

use every opportunity to address inequity and racism against Mexicans in the United States, but we should do so with caution.

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Endnotes

¹ The figure for Mexican immigrant dropouts in the United States is from the Pew Hispanic Center's recent (2003) report on Hispanic youth dropping out of U.S. high schools. The estimate for the number of students who terminate school before completion in Mexico was referred to in discussions among educational researchers at the Binational Symposium of Education Researchers, March 2004, in Mexico City.

² In 2003-2004, Colorado's lawmakers debated two bills: one granting in-state tuition to these students and one explicitly denying it. The first bill has been defeated; the second, which denies resident tuition to these students, has passed and is now in committee in the Senate.

³ The information for this Newcomer High School program report was provided by Susan Miller, English as a Second Language resource teacher for Jefferson County Schools and honorarium faculty member for Language, Literacy and Culture, School of Education, University of Colorado at Denver.

⁴ Detailed descriptions of different newcomer programs and models, which have been developed and documented for several decades, may be found at the Center for Applied Linguistics Web site (<http://www.cal.org>) and elsewhere.

⁵ This segment of the paper is from Brancard (2002), reprinted with permission.

⁶ This segment of the paper is taken from Clarke (2004).