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**CLASE WORKING PAPER:**  
**EDUCATING LATINO IMMIGRANT CHILDREN  
IN THE SHADOW OF STONE MOUNTAIN, GA:  
A CULTURAL HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE**

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RUNNING HEAD: Immigrant Children in the Shadow of Stone Mountain

Educating Latino Immigrant Children in the Shadow of Stone Mountain, Georgia: A  
Cultural Historical Perspective

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Abstract

This position paper advances an *additive English-plus* bilingual policy for Latino immigrant children theorized from a cultural historical framework. An example of the population shift of a Southern state and impact on that state's educational system is presented to illustrate how substandard education is being sustained for a rapidly growing sector of this ethnic population in the U.S. South. A research agenda for dismantling group-based inequality for future generations of Latino children is discussed with policy recommendations for access and equity in education for more students.

Educating Latino Immigrant Children in the Shadow of Stone Mountain, Georgia: A  
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We live and work in North Georgia—a Sunday’s drive from Stone Mountain where, in 1915, the second Ku Klux Klan was born (MacLean, 1995), and the same Stone Mountain to which Dr. Martin Luther King alluded in his legendary cry for rights, “Let freedom ring from the snow-capped Rockies of Colorado. Let freedom ring from the curvaceous slopes of California. But not only that. Let freedom ring from Stone Mountain of Georgia.” Decades later, the gaze of the Confederate leaders carved into the ridge’s granite side remains fixed on a rolling landscape where local and regional newspapers report of heinous incidents of white supremacist violence of which immigrants, especially Latinos, are progressively victim (see, e.g., Moser, 2004). In terms of the state’s K-12 programming, the developmental violence to which Latino youth are widely subject is not only the byproduct of the demographic tectonics of the region and the inveterate white supremacy that two decades of an unprecedented Latino migration has awakened, but also models of “unilineal acculturation” (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001, p. 160) such as the pull-out English as a Second Language (ESOL) programming that is the subject of our critique here.

Specifically, in Georgia and across the U.S., Latinos and other immigrant populations largely enter a system of “subtractive schooling” (Valenzuela, 1999)—an endless game of catch-up in short-sighted educational “remedies” grounded in a deficit mentality that categorizes native speakers of Spanish as non/limited English proficient (see also, Gibson, 1988, 1995, 1998, 2001; Gutiérrez, Asato, Santos, & Gotanda, 2002;

Gutiérrez, Baquedano-Lopez, & Alvarez, 2000; Moll & Ruiz, 2002; Valdés, 1996, 2001; Valenzuela, 1999, 2000, 2002, 2004). Instead of being honed for their potential talent or developmental advantage in becoming additive bilinguals, Latino school children are systematically routed into pull-out ESOL programs that systematically strip them of their potential talent or developmental advantage in becoming additive bilinguals and potentially retard their academic development to the point of falling so far behind they often give up and drop out at a higher rate than any other group in the state.

In this position paper, we examine the controversial issue of “What’s best for English learners?” to advance an *additive English-plus* bilingual policy theorized from a cultural historical framework. Using the example of Georgia, we discuss the dramatic population shift of this Southern state and its impact on the state’s educational system to illustrate how substandard education is being sustained for a rapidly growing sector of this ethnic population in the U.S. South. We conclude with a research agenda for dismantling group-based inequality for future generations of Latino children and policy recommendations for access and equity in education for more students.

#### Georgia, Latinos, and the Social Production of Monolingualism

Census data indicate that between 1990 and 2000, Georgia’s Latino population grew more than 300% and currently accounts for approximately 8% or over 860,000 of the state’s inhabitants (National Council of La Raza, 2005). Burgeoned by poultry, construction, and carpet industries, many counties and communities, especially north of Atlanta are already over 25% Latino and, by 2010, some are expected to exceed 75% (Selig Center for Economic Growth, 2006). Understanding the current popularity of ESOL pull-out despite the substantial research base favoring thoughtful bilingual

education (see, Thomas & Collier, 1999; Thomas & Collier, 2002, 2004) requires both recognition and analysis of the histories of power relations among the groups and individuals of which schools are comprised and the multi-layered contexts in which such power-inequalities have been historically established and sustained (see, Lewis, Enciso, & Moje, 2007; Pedro Portes, 2005).

The English-plus stance we advocate is informed by interrelated cultural-historical theoretical framework that share the notion that higher mental functions in humans are mediated by meaningful social interaction and activity (see, Cole, 1996; Cole, Engeström, Vasquez, & University of California San Diego. Laboratory of Comparative Human Cognition, 1997; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Rogoff, 2003; Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 1985). Rejecting the notion that human psychological development or a cultural historical phenomenon such as the achievement gap in Georgia schools can be separated from the social, cultural, and historical contexts in which individuals participate either directly or peripherally (see, Lave & Wenger, 1991), cultural-historical theory understands human thought as distributed across the material tools and social and cultural psychological devices that women and men have shaped over time and that have in turn shaped them (Salomon, 1993). To that end, educational policy for Latinos in Georgia and elsewhere must aim at understanding and dismantling the mechanisms that shape or, in Vygotskian parlance, “mediate” the educational under-development of many U.S. Latinos and other populations outside of the dominant white middle class. From a cultural historical stance, the category of Latino Students Placed at Risk can only be understood as the product of social and historical activity. That is, if such a huge new generation of English learners is being under prepared across the state, it can only be assumed that such

under-achievement is not a random coincidence. Rather, it may be the byproduct of a lack of know-how, good faith, and praxis that remain fixed in the U.S. educational institutional structure and that sustain an educational and social apartheid (P. Portes, 2005).

Insofar the value of learning a second language is concerned, it seems that the potential of Latino Students Placed at Risk can be ignored for painfully obvious reasons. Both the public and policy makers require a broader understanding of what is at stake. Because immigrant children eventually do learn English (A. Portes & Rumbaut, 2001), we suspect that large-scale voter resistance to publicly funded Spanish/English bilingualism is intensified by a resurgence of “new American nativism” (Sanchez, 1997) fueled by fears of limited resources, reverse discrimination, and an unstable national identity. Moreover, limited layperson knowledge about the development of literacy in a second language and its impact on human and societal development is of great concern. Public and policy makers require a broader understanding of what is at stake.

When humans master two or more symbol systems that require mental operations that are supplemental to those of a monolingual, there is a value added. To that end, sign language, chess, and Latin have positive correlations with high academic and intellectual performance. At the collective level, when a society has a large sector of such bilinguals in the making, as is the case with the integration of migration waves globally, development occurs and interacts between the collective and individual.

There has been historic interest in a relationship between what Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco (2001) describe as the “hybrid identities and bicultural competencies” that society potentially nurtures and cultivates in immigrant children and a so-called

“immigrant edge” (see, e.g., Peal & Lambert, 1962). Indeed, from a cultural historical perspective, it may be that the very edge that the U.S. and the Soviet Union had in recent history over other societies was, in part, the product of a cultural-historical process distinct from others in terms of relatively more literate, multicultural opportunities for many cultures at one time—a *de facto* one language plus policy.

While the Cold War resulted in an increase in the teaching and learning of Soviet languages in the same way that the current War on Terror has swelled interest and federal subsidies for teaching and learning in Arabic and Farsi, or the emergence of China as an economic powerhouse has led to an unprecedented increase in Mandarin studies, the demographic shift such as the one to which Georgia has been witness for the past decade has not resulted in the state’s embracing Spanish as a potential second language. Instead, in Georgia and across the U.S. the erasure of Latino children’s native tongue appears to be what many consider best for both Latino children and the nation.

#### Georgia’s Latino Children

In 2005, approximately one in 12 students enrolled in Georgia’s public school system was Latino; of these, three in five were categorized as Limited English Proficient by the state’s measure; in the end, less than half of Latino seniors graduated from high school that same year (National Council of La Raza, 2005). Thus, generations of Spanish speaking children have and continue to be placed at risk as soon as they are assessed for their level of English proficiency and routed to ESL coursework or sheltered instruction—even when better options (remedies) are available through bilingual education or dual immersion programs. Thus, as millions of U.S. born Spanish speaking preschool children are under-prepared to succeed in and after school, what seems to be

consistently missing from the polemics surrounding Spanish/English bilingualism is a developmental perspective. Latino children in Georgia often live in marginalized communities alienated from English-speaking agents. They are already doomed to subtractive conditions for the most part. Under a more thoughtful policy, such children would be regarded as a national resource to be prized and cultivated. Many are gifted and talented in the sense of the traditional definition of being in the top 5% of the population with a special linguistic aptitude.

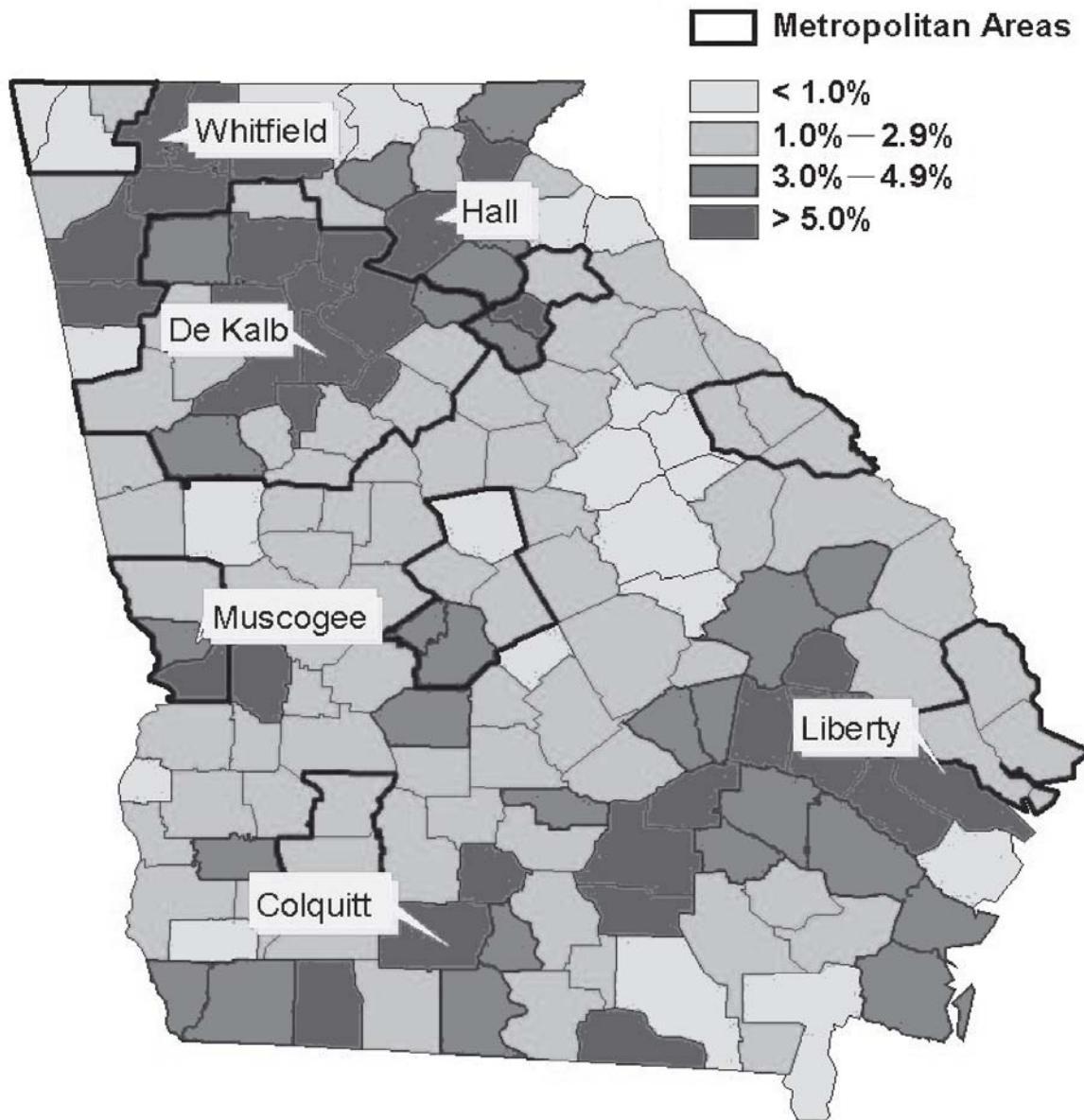
The fact that the potential of Latino children remains undervalued in the U.S. has its roots in a genetic inferiority movement that drew from so-called scientific evidence to brand non-majority groups intellectually deficient and their families pathological (see, e.g., Herrnstein, 1971; Jensen, 1969). Such families, in turn, produced damaged children who were framed as objects of pity to be granted a “special status as victims” (Scott, 1997, p. xiii). In reality, Latino children’s legal entitlement to quality public schooling is routinely violated. They attend under funded, substandard schools, staffed with teachers that are often not adequately prepared with knowledge and skills to teach them (Kozol, 1992; Viadero, 2000). The bottom line is that the already unresolved problem of an achievement gap, created mainly by the structure of the current educational system, will only become exacerbated as young Latinos developing literacy are denied the resource of their native tongue. They are left behind learning English while other groups proceed to meet grade-level standards at a faster or *normal* pace. By the time the K-12 race is over, most Latino children generally obtain a middle school education and low-income futures from the current system. Additionally, these children are often blamed for schools’ failing to make adequate yearly progress.

To illustrate the intersection of Latino migration and school achievement in Georgia, we turn to two visuals. The first, Table 1 (Georgia Department of Education, 2007), indicates the Spring 2005 outcomes of Georgia's high school graduation tests. The second, Figure 1 (Atiles & Bohon, 2002), represents the proportional distribution of the Latinos by Georgia county lines.

Table 1: 2005 Spring Results for Georgia High School Graduation Test (Georgia Department of Education, 2007)

Student Category	Percent Passing Content Area			
	English Language Arts	Math	Social Studies	Science
Grade 11 Regular Program, First-time Test Takers	97%	95%	87%	71%
Special Education, First-time Test Takers	70%	58%	46%	31%
Limited English Proficient/English Language Learners, First-time Test Takers	64%	78%	46%	26%
Gender: (All Test Takers Included)				
Female	95%	89%	76%	55%
Male	92%	89%	79%	63%
Ethnic Group: (All Test Takers Included)				
Asian/Pacific Islander	93%	97%	85%	69%
African American	89%	80%	64%	41%
Hispanic	81%	84%	65%	41%
Native American/Alaskan Native	92%	88%	76%	58%
White	97%	95%	88%	75%
Multi Ethnic	95%	91%	80%	61%

Figure 1: Percent Hispanic Population of Total, 2000 (p. 8Atilles & Bohon, 2002)



Overlapping the table and figure with the projected state-wide growth rates of Latinos we have discussed creates a statistical understanding of how widespread and severe the under-education of Latinos is. Furthermore, given the current climate of swelling hostility

towards Latinos in Georgia, the already striking achievement gap threatens to increase with time.

The current widespread monolingual ESOL pull-out or sheltered programming strips America's majority-minority population, Latinos, from the obvious advantages of bilingualism and is, furthermore, instrumental in sustaining a massive proportional literacy gap ranging from three to five grade levels (see, P. Portes, 1996; 2005). At a policy level there are few if any arguments that compare the above situation to having a massive epidemic for which there is a known remedy and the socio-cultural system that governs structure does not mobilize resources to prevent loss of human capital. Few state department of education leaders understand the structural barriers that will and presently under-develop Latino and other language learners' socio-linguistic capital by design. Too few bilingual educators are being prepared today. In addition to the failure to address the gross inequalities affecting other groups overrepresented in poverty, we are forging a future that risks the whole nation by not mobilizing cost effective strategies known to work. Since young children have no educational rights, the perpetration occurs disproportionately on certain groups of low SES immigrants at a time when a viable solution may be within reach.

The conundrum is that for the majority of American voters who also happen to lack expertise and understanding in language education, psychology, and, particularly, the socio-economic potential of having more bilinguals in the nation, the status quo makes perfectly good sense. Few want to pay for extra resources to be invested solely in "other people's children" (Delpit, 1995). Besides the minority of citizens who appreciate the long-terms benefits of bilingualism to their children, the popular American psyche is

unconvinced of the need or benefit of their monolingual English children mastering a second language before high school graduation or the larger societal implications of a nation of additive bilinguals. The prevailing view remains that each group of immigrants must wait their place in line, more specifically, at their place in a cultural historical time line just like their non-Anglo European predecessors. The problem is that waiting for equity in learning and economic opportunity for those subject to group-based inequality has not been a reliable strategy.

Underlying this historical situation is a national identity set of issues. However, from a cultural historical analysis, the structural conditions have already been organized for a caste-like future that relegates Latino children to intergenerational urban or rural poverty unless dismantling educational inequality becomes a higher socio-cultural priority. The results are already coming in and group-based inequality in learning and development opportunities grows as we shift from a relatively democratic to an increasingly undemocratic oligarchy that is not only transnational but also richer everyday. What is most wrong with this picture is the squandering of human capital and the loss of an opportunity in this historical moment to shift gears and move into a more intelligent direction. In the last decade, at least one Spanish/English bilingual K-2 option has appeared on the outskirts of Atlanta in the form of a charter school. Clearly, a more systemic approach is needed.

#### What Could be Better for U.S. Latino Children?

In most economically expanding regions of the country such as Georgia and the I-85 corridor stretching all the way to Richmond, Virginia, school districts generally remain unprepared to sort out Latino students' right to be educated effectively. This

inability or even reluctance raises key questions for a Latino policy research agenda given the risks of a new underclass. Until recently there existed little research-based evidence to support a change in a historic sink-or-swim policy for immigrant education and or monolingual language education. Today, however, the ample research cataloging the benefits of effective and balanced bilingual education particularly in the elementary school grades is lost in translation between intransigent political agendas, prejudice, and collective denial of the dynamics of the dynamics of 21<sup>st</sup> century globalism. The immediate problem is that ignoring the warning signals of a demographic shift involving the development of children from a large sector of the population has a bearing on the sustained well being of the nation as a whole. It is sort of like global warming—20 or 30 years ago. If we had only done something then we might be better off today—not that we didn't know or at least suspect what might happen. In the meantime, Atlanta has nearly run out of water.

A cultural-historical analysis of Georgia's ambivalence about bilingual Spanish/English education is indicative of how a *not so new* apartheid is being reconstructed and reinforced in the South by the systemic under-education of Latino immigrant children. Georgia is not the problem; we only use this case example to reflect on a national issue. When we adhere to an educational system that stratifies, group based inequality becomes even more disturbing when a huge demographic shift such as the one currently taking place in the region makes that inequality all the more apparent. Georgia's Latino baby boom reveals longstanding constraints imposed on all low-income children by the educational system's structure and practices. Large segments of the U.S.

population sink deeper into poverty through under-education perpetrated daily at a time when viable solutions have been researched and demonstrated.

Today there is a rekindled call for early age education for Latino children before they enter school in spite of hard evidence that while this is an effective strategy, it will wash out later in elementary school unless corresponding support structures are organized. This call is not leading to significant change and most children are not ready to learn when they enter school. If the South represents a new laboratory, the hard questions to ask may be:

- To what extent can a sound, strategic policy initiative such as the one advanced here actually make a difference even as more and more hard evidence is presented?
- There is now a new imperative to focus on policy research that can equip decision makers with the cost-benefit, empirical data needed to prevail in the courts and legislatures. However, if reason and data do not produce structural and sustainable change, how is political will to be developed and changed, particularly since equity for all groups is required for excellence in public education?

While these remain the hard socio-cultural questions of the day, it remains clear that we need to produce more bilingual, biliterate, and bicultural graduates at all levels, not just English proficient ones. One direction in districts with high density of Spanish speakers is for bilingual schools to be organized in tandem with higher education programs.

In Georgia, many children are still pulled out for ESOL for lack of better prepared teachers and instruction, and forced to fall further behind. Furthermore, without a political base, they await the slow, gradual education designed for a majority that may

eventually discover that bilingual education and dual immersion options for some of their own kids in some schools in some districts may actually someday pay off. As of this writing, little evidence exists to suggest that sheltered instruction or co-teaching programs are closing the gap in reliable ways and for the long term.

In closing, one must ask then about the extent to which the basic problem is socio-genetic and hinges on the collective learning curve of the dominant class and the extent to which it will respond to its own social interest. The latter is not always dependent on impact analysis research but beliefs and expectations grounded in cultural history. Perhaps for equity in schooling to be widespread, Latinos and other English learners must wait until a critical mass of citizens understands the double advantage of bilingual schools and education as a national priority; one that helps *prevent* or, at minimum, diminish the achievement gap while simultaneously providing the *means* to increase the intellectual level of more students in a variety of contexts.

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