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ABSTRACT

Demographic trends reveal that minorities increasingly will become a larger percentage of the U.S. population. This paper argues that the nation and California in particular are doomed if strides are not made toward educating and using minority peoples as resources and assets to this multicultural nation. The paper identifies different cultural sub-groups within the Mexican-American community and theories of learning differences in an effort to develop ideas and strategies for improving minority retention and success in U.S. schools. (Contains seven references.) (DB)

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Changing Demographics and the Importance of Culture in  
Student Learning Styles

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## Changing Demographics and the Importance of Culture in Student Learning Styles

### I. Demographic Trends in the Minority population.

Demographic trends are very important to help to demonstrate the importance of changing the inequality that now exists in today's educational system for minorities. Our nation and California in particular is doomed if we do not make strides toward educating and using minorities as a resource and an asset to our multi-cultural nation.

The Center for Immigration Studies has concluded that the number of legal immigrants entering the United States between 1981 and 1990 will equal or surpass the 8.7 million that arrived between 1901 and 1910, the historic highmark for immigration in the United States. If illegal immigrants are included, the number of new immigrants rises several million more.

By 2000, there will be a 56% increase in the amount of Hispanics, a 76% increase in Asians, and a 9% in blacks in the current population. We currently have 250,000,000 people in the U.S. Currently Hispanics only make up 7.3% of the population of the U.S.

In California racial and ethnic minorities account for 42.4% of the population. This figure will be 49.5% by 2005 according to the Intergroup Relations Division of the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith.

*Minorities will be:*

1 in 3 people by the year 2000. They will be 33% of all people in the U.S.

Five states receive the greatest number of minorities: California, Texas, New York, Florida, and Illinois - in these states if trends continue- the minority population will be over 50%.

By 2030, California's population, which will have increased from 24 million in 1980 to 43 million and will be 61% minority.

39% Hispanic (Very important to educate these people)  
11% Black  
6% Asian

In 1985, the Hispanic population of California was estimated to be at 23%. Keep in mind that these approximations are low and do not account for all of the illegal aliens that enter from Mexico each day.

Between 1970 and 1980, the number of Hispanic Americans in the nation's poorest census tracts increased by 300 percent. We are creating a two-tier society of the haves and the have nots...

*Our nations schools statistics:*

Minorities now constitute 60-70% of the school population in the nation's 25 largest cities. In the five states mentioned before the number is 80%. These schools may enroll students from 70-80 different countries and 30 different language groups. 1/3 of Hispanics are under the age of 15. This goes to show you the importance of persuading, making available, and striving to get Hispanics in Higher education in much greater proportions. The time is now! We cannot miss the boat. We must provide policies which enhance opportunity and improve success for minorities.

30% of all students drop out.

40% of Hispanic students dropout

In urban areas it is even higher, 62% of Hispanics in New York drop out of school as compared to 20% of whites.

## II. Cultural Sub-groups within the Chicano Community

*Traditional:* The primary language is Spanish; immediate family is very important and extended family plays a major role; adhere to Mexican Catholic ideology; adults are important role models; modeling is an important teaching dynamic in the family; group and community competition are important; group achievement is very important.

*Dualistic:* Adults speak Spanish, children speak English; the nuclear family is important; adhere to a mixture of Mexican Catholic and American Catholic ideology; peer groups are relatively important; peer models have more influence than adults; group achievement is relatively important.

*Assimilated:* Primary language is English; nuclear family is very strong; adhere to American Catholic and Protestant ideology; family ties have little or no influence in interpersonal relations; peer models are more important; individual competition and achievement are important.

### III. Theories of Learning Differences

Cultural Deprivation Theory- certain minorities experiences in their homes do not transmit the cultural patterns necessary for the types of learning characteristic of the schools and the larger society.

Cultural Differences Theory- Different groups have particular learning styles which need to be understood. For example, whites are field independent -- they work better alone and are often perceived as good students and hard workers. Mexican-Americans are field independent and work better in groups where they are trying to accomplish a common goal.

Cultural differences have been documented in three different areas:

1. cooperative/competitive human relationship styles
  - a. Mexican Americans are more motivated by altruism or group enhancement goals while Anglo-American children have stronger competitive motives.
2. field dependent/field independent cognitive styles
3. authoritarianism
  - a. Mexican families are highly authoritarian and father-dominated, employ strict child-rearing methods, encourage strong obedience and authority, and hold a dominant/submissive position concerning male/female relationships.

Value Conflicts - Mexican-American students are caught between two cultures with different values, those of home (community) and school (society) and , as a consequence, experience value conflicts (this is like the "cultural gap" theory).

School Achivement for Mexicans in America - Studies of high and low achieving students suggest that competitiveness and field independence are behaviors that differentiate high achievers from low-achievers. If this is true, then Mexican-American students may be caught between a home culture that advocates compliance with authority, field dependence, and cooperation and a school culture that values independence and competition. Low achievement may be a manifestation of the conflict (Beunning 1986).

Awareness of Cultural Differences - We need to be aware of the attitudes of cultural groups in the schools and the ways that cultural attitudes may be related to success in school. The more understanding we have of the differences of various ethnic groups the better we are able to teach our students.

### **III. Learning Styles of Chicano Students as Compared to Anglo American Students**

(See Chart and handout)

### **IV. What can be done to improve minority retention/success in our schools**

Research suggests that in order for a minority (Chicano) to be successful in college we need to have/offer;

- a. Role models (Instructors, history makers, famous chicano persons, successful hispanics, etc.)
- b. A support person (a family member, counselor, mentor, instructor)
- c. Family support and an understanding of the value of education.
- d. Participation and the availability of extra-curricular activities.  
Research has shown that the biggest problem can be loneliness and isolation on a college campus.
- e. An understanding of racism- How & Why it works against them. They need to know the reality of the real world - the racism, prejudice, and what they can expect even once they graduate. Expectations need to be realistic.
- f. They need a positive self image. Need to build self-esteem and encourage the development of particular skills and not just stress certain subjects they are having difficulty in (reading, English etc.).
- g. A realistic self-appraisal
- h. Preference for long-range goals, not immediate gratification.
- i. A successful leadership experience to help build confidence.
- j. Demonstrated community service.

--Greatly increase the number of early childhood programs available to at-risk youngsters. Research has shown that participants in these programs are more likely to go on to college.

--Institute alternatives to present school tracking systems. Today 75 percent of Hispanic students are placed in lower tracks that offer them inferior learning opportunities. Unfair and unequal education as well as the fact that the self-fulfilling prophecy may take place.

--Institute programs in the basic skills that cater to minority groups' needs and focus on encouraging them to be successful in college and to continue their education. Emphasize long-range goals and the value of education, for both economic gain and personal enrichment.

--Initiate extensive tutoring programs for minorities (like in Stand & Deliver) to eliminate any deficiencies they may have in reading, writing, English, Math, and any other subject. Offer state-funded support programs which will eventually pay for themselves because of the long-term benefits to society.

# Cultural Differences and Value Conflicts in Learning Styles Between Mexican and Anglo Students

## *Three types of Cultural Subgroups within the Chicano Community:*

**Traditional:** The primary language is Spanish; immediate family is very important and extended family plays a major role; adhere to Mexican Catholic ideology; adults are important role models; modeling is an important teaching dynamic in the family; group and community competition are important; group achievement is very important.

**Dualistic:** Adults speak Spanish, children speak English; the nuclear family is important; adhere to a mixture of Mexican Catholic and American Catholic ideology; peer groups are relatively important; peer models have more influence than adults; group achievement is relatively important.

**Assimilated:** Primary language is English; nuclear family is very strong; adhere to American Catholic and Protestant ideology; family ties have little or no influence in interpersonal relations; peer models are more important; individual competition and achievement are important.

### Mexican Students

vs.

### Anglo American Students

#### Field dependent learners:

1. works well in groups.
2. perceives the totality, then the specific.
3. is motivated by group competition and achievement.
4. is more affected by outside stimuli such as the instructor or the environment when solving a problem or performing a task.
5. is influenced more by affective variables in learning.
6. is usually more task oriented.

#### Field independent learners:

1. can work well alone.
2. perceives the specific, then the totality.
3. is motivated by individual competition and achievement.
4. is not affected as much by outside stimuli such as the instructor or the environment when solving a problem or task.
5. has well developed analytical abilities.



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