

Examining Education for Latinas/os in Chicago: A CRT/LatCrit Approach

By Erica R. Davila
& Ann Aviles de Bradley

Introduction

Schools are social institutions that mirror the larger society. In the United States (U.S.), a compulsory public school system was developed to address the needs of industry, speaking to the direct effect society has on the creation and purpose of schooling. “Far from creating independent thinkers, schools have always, throughout history, played an institutional role in a system of control and coercion” (Macedo in Chomsky, 2000, p 3). The general purpose of public schools has not changed since its inception—students continue to be educated to accept ideologies that serve the needs of the dominant class. Yet, the purpose of schooling has been contested throughout the history of the U.S. by both dominant groups and the oppressed.

This article will explore the sociopolitical context of education policy, particularly as it relates to Latina/o education. We will highlight the status of Latina/os within the Chicago Public Schools (CPS) to examine

Erica R. Davila is an assistant professor and coordinator of urban education at Arcadia University, Glenside, Pennsylvania; Ann Aviles de Bradley is the education director with the Michael Barlow Center at St. Leonard’s Ministries, Chicago, Illinois.

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the impact of education policy designed to benefit few and disenfranchise most. The authors draw attention to the injustices of Latinas/os in CPS and examine this status within a Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Critical Latino Theory (LatCrit) framework. CRT helped us create a space that will highlight the resistance and hope of Latina/os in CPS while uncovering the struggle and injustice. Furthermore, we will draw from the lens of LatCrit (Solorzano & Bernal, 2001) to situate our research within a paradigm that speaks to Latina/o school experiences in a very specific way. CRT and LatCrit encompass all of the same assumptions and underpinnings (Villalpando, 2004), but LatCrit provides a context for the social, historical, and political reception and impact of Latina/os in the U.S., and provides theoretical space to analyze experiences of language and immigration among other lived experiences rooted in the resistance and oppression of Latinas/os.

In the last thirty years, the response of public schools to policy mandates stemming from the Civil Rights Movement that were intended to protect the rights of people of color, including Latina/os, sheds light on how little has changed in the structure and function of schools. From the time we were allowed to obtain an education in the same system as the dominant class and race, marginalized groups have been told that schools are vehicles to equal opportunity; schools have even been described as “the great equalizer.” The Latina/o population is by and large, young, and the erosion of equality in American schooling has hit it hard. However, the struggle for school equity for Latina/os has been coupled with a strong history of resistance rooted in community and grassroots organizing. As Spring (1991) states;

From World War II to the 1990s [and today], Native Americans, Puerto Ricans, African Americans and Mexican Americans have demanded that public schools recognize their distinct cultures and incorporate these cultures into curricula and textbooks. (p. 195)

The struggle for equity in education for Latina/os has not ended. While some schools and school districts have made affirmative efforts to fully include the life experiences and histories of the students they serve, the vast majority of public schools serving Latinas/os have not done so (Valenzuela, 1999). Furthermore, while progressive educators have made some gains to better serve Latina/os during the 1960s and 1970s, the sharp conservative turn in the 1980s laid the foundation for many school policies and practices that worked against the gains made in areas such as culturally inclusive curricula and bilingual education. For this paper, we have focused on the inequities that clearly disenfranchise Latina/o students by drawing on two editions of a previous research project (Aviles, Capeheart, Davila, & Miller, 2004) and (Aviles, Capeheart, Davila, Miller, & Rodriguez-Lucero, 2006) which is discussed further in our methods section (We will refer to these reports as Dando 2004 and Dando 2006 for the duration of this paper). Using the data we collected for these reports we will examine the ways in which CRT and LatCrit can assist in exposing the historical and political context of systemic educational practices that are designed to hinder real progress for Latinas/os.

In 2005, Latinas/os made up close to two-fifths (38%) of the CPS student population second only to African-Americans (49%). Latinas/os have increased in their percentage representation since the 2002 data were released in a previous report (Dando, 2004). At that time Latinas/os made up 36 percent of the student population. Between 2002 and 2005, the African American student population declined from representing a little over the major student population (51%) in 2002 to representing less than a majority (49%) in 2005. The White student population declined by one percent—from 9 percent in 2002 to 8 percent in 2005. The findings in this report (Dando, 2006) paint a portrait of the educational context and the academic achievement gap for Latinas/os in CPS. Unfortunately, this portrait exposed many inequities for Latina/o students. Some of the conditions include, but are not limited to: lack of early childhood educational opportunities for Latina/o families, overcrowding of Latina/o schools, and a lack of Latina/o teachers and administrators.

In addition to these overarching issues which have been the reality for Latinas/os in CPS for far too long, there are other compelling conditions addressed in the report that include the rise of homeless students and the lack of attention to federal mandates to help support this group of students, the under representation of Latinas/os in Local School Councils and the lack of transparency in budgeting to help the Latina/o community understand the allocation of funding. While the research report (Dando, 2006) aimed to provide a wide overview of the services or lack of services for Latina/o children in CPS, this paper will highlight a few of the areas addressed in the report. The areas we will highlight and examine through a CRT and LatCrit framework are: (1) Early Childhood Education; (2) Standardized Assessment; (3) Bilingual Education; and (4) Drop-out/push-out rates.

Theoretical Framework

CRT scholars draw from various educational foundations and intersections within these foundations. The social construction of race and other identities is rooted in sociological studies. Furthermore, historical foundations of education as well as education policy studies help us see the realities of oppression that unfold. This interdisciplinary backdrop will help us contextualize the data within the social context of institutional oppression. The lack of educational opportunities for Latina/o students speaks to the oppression students endure on an institutional level. The exposition of institutional racism which can be analyzed through a sociological perspective of struggle and resistance, and policies born from these tensions are critical to deconstruct. Further, the interdisciplinary nature of CRT and LatCrit provide us with theoretical insights rooted in lived experience.

Both CRT and LatCrit serve as frameworks that assist in our understanding of areas related to the racial inequity embedded in our society. CRT is used to understand educational issues such as school discipline and hierarchy, testing, tracking and curriculum (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Often when persons think about race and racism in America, the conversation frequently focuses on issues of oppres-

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sion among the African American community. We recognize this is a necessary and critical conversation; however, it often leaves little space to discuss common areas of concern for all populations of color, as well as illuminate areas specific to these other groups. The Latina/o population in the U.S. is quickly growing and therefore it is incumbent upon education scholars to identify theoretical frameworks that help us to move beyond the traditional Black-White binary. LatCrit helps us in our efforts to take on such a task. LatCrit theory in education is defined as:

...a framework that can be used to theorize and examine the ways in which race and racism explicitly and implicitly impact on the educational structures, processes and discourses that effect People of Color generally and Latinas/os specifically. (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001, p. 479)

Johnson and Martinez (n.d.) note that LatCrit should not be viewed as a challenge to CRT, but as building on its achievements and moving in an independent direction to shed additional light on the subordination of Latinas/os. Iglesias (1997) identifies LatCrit as an exploration of how CRT could be expanded beyond the Black/White paradigm, incorporating a fuller, more contextualized analysis of the cultural, political and economic dimensions of White supremacy, particularly its impact on Latinas/os in their individual and collective struggles for social justice and self-understanding. Further, LatCrit provides epistemological, methodological and theoretical contributions to educational research (Fernandez, 2002). Valdes (1998) also notes LatCrit as an emerging field of scholarship that critically examines the social and legal positioning of Latina/os within the U.S. in an effort to resolve the shortcomings of our current legal and social conditions. CRT and LatCrit can help in analyzing racial discrimination and patterns of racial exclusion (Villalpando, 2004). CRT and LatCrit frameworks do not see race as peripheral to the experiences of people of color (Fernandez, 2002). Furthermore, these two frameworks emphasize the need to view practices, policies and policymaking within an appropriate cultural and historical context, helping us to better understand their intersections to race/ethnicity and racism, with the ultimate goal being to rectify the structural inequities inherent in educational institutions.

Despite the fact that many people think of race as being a direct result of biological and/or genetic differences, in reality, race is “historically and socially constructed, created (and recreated) by how people are perceived and treated in the normal actions of everyday life...“race” is never fixed, it is a dynamic, constantly changing relationship” (Marable, 2002, p. 22). Recognizing the construction and malleability of race is often hard for people to accept. In the current day, we find that a great majority of people deny that race matters (Winant, 2004 ; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Although people readily acknowledge the phenotypical differences among the races, many believe that the civil rights movement brought about justice (albeit slowly) promoting equality among all races. However, many scholars believe that due to the everchanging constructions of race, it has simply become

more sophisticated, making it harder to identify. As Winant (2004) powerfully states, "...a key problem of racism today, is its denial or flattening..." (p. 48). CRT, and we argue LatCrit, are connected to the development of a new approach to examining race, racism and law post civil-rights (Tate, 1997).

In an effort to identify, name and address educational issues for Latina/o students within a specific context, CRT and LatCrit will be utilized as the lens in which these issues are discussed. These frameworks are built upon the following themes: (1) The centrality of race and racism and their intersectionality with other forms of subordination, (2) Challenge dominant ideology, (3) Commitment to social justice, (4) Centrality of experiential knowledge, and (5) The transdisciplinary perspective (Solorzano and Yosso, 2001). These five themes are integral to understanding the educational landscape of the Latina/o student experience within the Chicago Public School system.

Race and racism are endemic to society; they are ordinary and part of our everyday. However, there are various forms of oppression (race, class, gender, etc.) and one form of oppression does not supercede or take precedence over another. Instead these various forms of oppressions intersect to help frame and understand one's experience. Even among Latinas/os, we find various forms of oppression based on factors such as language and citizenship. What is important to note here are the social and institutional hierarchies that oppress people based on factors that do not fit within white social norms.

CRT and LatCrit seek to challenge dominant ideologies in schools that are rooted in white supremacy. "A CRT in education challenges the traditional claims that the educational system and its institutions make toward objectivity, meritocracy, color-blindness, race neutrality, and equal opportunity" (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001, p. 472). These issues became evident in our work as it relates to Latina/o students in CPS. The CPS administration did not recognize their role in perpetuating the oppression of Latina/o students. However, CRT and LatCrit can help us uncover these "race neutral" practices and policies pervasive within the CPS system.

Although Latina/o students are among the fastest growing population in the U.S., their educational experiences are often mired in oppression. CRT is committed to social justice, as it seeks to liberate and transform all forms of oppression. Our goal in documenting the conditions of Latina/o students in CPS also seeks to transform the systemic oppression that plagues the school system, in the hope of offering a more liberatory response to students, families and communities encountering the CPS system. Vital to this process is incorporating and centering the experiential knowledge of people of color. During our research process, we met with Latina/o teachers, staff and ancillary staff (school psychologist, ESL teachers, etc) as well as members of the Latina/o community (parents and community organizers). Lastly, CRT in education incorporates transdisciplinary knowledge, in its quest to better understand the many "isms" found in education (racism, sexism, etc.). This is of particular relevance to our work, as Latina/o identity encompasses issues of class, race, language, and citizenship, pushing Latina/o education scholarship to

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incorporate various disciplines (history, sociology, ethnic studies, etc.) to better understand oppressive structures in education (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001).

Methods/Data Collection

Several sources were identified in collecting data and information about Latina/o students in CPS. Our primary sources of data came from the Chicago Public School system itself. We also drew data from the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE), as well as various community based organizations in Chicago who have worked to address educational issues within CPS for decades. Lastly, we obtained articles from Chicago media sources (newspapers, magazines). Obtaining primary data from CPS was a challenge and may have not been possible without the political support of a Latino State Senator from a predominantly Latina/o district in Chicago, and a Latina/o education advisory committee that has worked for decades on improving public education for Latinas/os in Chicago.

The impetus for our report came out of community concern regarding the education of Latina/o students entering the CPS system. Many teachers, school personnel, and parents consistently came to the Senator's office with concerns such as school funding, lack of bilingual staff and services, and enrolling their children in kindergarten programs (half and full day). It was important for our research to be rooted within the concerns of the community, focusing on the needs and requests of the parents, students and community members, allowing us to build on the experiential knowledge of people of color.

During the fall/winter of early 2002 the first author met committee members from the Educational Advisory Committee (2 bilingual school psychologists, 2 Latina university faculty) and the Senator of the predominantly Latina/o district at a Latina/o alumni event. During this interaction, the subject of writing a report that would serve as a snapshot of the status of Latina/o/a students in CPS developed. Being a graduate student in Educational Policy and a product of CPS herself, compelled the first author to be a part of the research sub-committee that would collect, analyze and document the conditions within CPS for Latina/o students. Due to the small size of the committee and the need for more researchers to undertake such a task (with no funding), she reached out to another graduate student (2nd author) also a graduate student in an Educational Policy program and a product of CPS, to be a part of the research committee. We both felt strongly about the issues and were in the process of taking education courses that helped us both to view our educational experiences critically. With our critical lenses in hand, we applied this to our role as researchers. The committee consisted of four Latinas during the 2004 production and in 2006 our research committee grew by 1, totaling 5 Latinas. As authors of this work, we situate ourselves as Puerto Rican females, sharing our lived experiences not only as researchers but as Latina students who matriculated through the CPS system during the 1980s through the mid 1990s.

Data collection

We met with teachers and members of the Latina/o district advisory committee to hear their concerns. This in turn informed the questions we posed and data we requested from CPS. We generated several research questions in the following areas: academic options, early childhood education, assessment, dropout, specialized programs (TBE, SpEd and ELL, gifted ed.) for the 2004 report. We submitted the questions to the education advisory committee and the senator. The senator submitted the questions to CPS from his office. The education advisory committee had previous experience trying to obtain data from CPS unsuccessfully, unless the requests came directly from the Senator. The chair of the advisory committee was also instrumental to this process. She has worked as a school social worker in CPS for decades and she was influential in helping the researchers gather information and meet with key administrators in CPS. The data collection was a learning process for us regarding the structure of CPS. Our first round of requests for information was met with resistance, many of our questions were responded to with “our system does not collect this data” or worse, CPS simply did not acknowledge our request for the information. After reviewing the information received, we submitted requests once again to obtain more information, and received the same response. Therefore we worked with the data we were able to obtain, and also reached out to ISBE, community organizations and other resources that examined CPS in general and specifically in relationship to Latina/o students.

Report authors focused on educational areas of which they had previous experience and/or was an area of interest. The data was then separated by theme (e.g. dropout, bilingual education, etc.). Each of the report authors performed a quantitative analysis of their data while also seeking out resources and information to fill in missing data. Outside resources were also identified to provide a historical, policy, and political analysis of Latina/o students in CPS. All the authors were involved in reading and revising one another’s chapters. These drafts were also shared with the larger educational advisory committee for revisions and feedback. We received invaluable feedback from the committee throughout the writing process.

Once the report was complete, we applied for funding through the Woods Foundation in Chicago. We used this funding to translate the report into Spanish as well as edit and publish the report so it would be widely disseminated. The committee also sought out copyright from the U.S. government for the research report. Based on the data analyzed, we provided recommendations to CPS during various meetings held to address the shortcomings outlined in the report. Two years after the initial report was released, we again requested data to determine if any improvements had been made since the initial report. Unfortunately in 2005-2006 follow-up conversations and requests, we found devastating results that mirrored the social inequities that exist on a national level pertaining to children of color and lower socioeconomic status. Furthermore, most of the people (5 of 7 were new personnel) we met with two years prior had left the district and we had to work

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with new heads of departments that were unfamiliar with our previous work. For the 2006 report, we made comparisons to the previous findings (Dando, 2004) and also added the categories of homelessness, Local School Councils (LSCs), and Latina/o population movement. The same data collection and analysis process was completed for the 2006 report. It is the 2006 report that is primarily analyzed and discussed in this paper, while we draw on some of the 2004 data to discuss the progression or regression of the themes examined.

Application of CRT/LatCrit

In this section we will highlight four themes from our research and use a CRT and LatCrit framework to discuss the structural inequities for Latina/o children in CPS. The four themes we will discuss are: (1) Early Childhood Education; (2) Standardized Assessment; (3) Overcrowding and Drop-out rates; and (4) Bilingual Education. For each of these themes we will share key findings and a critical discussion of the theme through the analytical lens of CRT and LatCrit.

Early Childhood Education

For more than 40 years, the role of early childhood education as a method for ensuring school success has been documented (Zigler & Styfco, 1994). According to our research findings, Latina/o children in CPS are not offered enough options for quality early childhood education, which speaks to a critical inequity for our very youngest. There are many challenges for the Latina/o community in CPS within this area of public schooling.

First, the CPS Child Parent Centers are almost absent within the predominately Latina/o schools. While Latina/o children made up 39% of the preschool enrollment during the 2003-2004 school year, only 6% of the Child Parent Center enrollments were Latina/o. In our report (Dando, 2006) we recommended that the department of Early Childhood Education of CPS continue to expand the options available for preschool programs for the rising number of Latina/o children within the district boundaries.

The second key finding was that from the 2004-2005 to the 2005-2006 school year, the percentage of Latina/o children enrolled in half day Kindergarten increased from 59% to 67%. This factor is exacerbated by the high numbers of Latina/o children in overcrowded schools. Research support of the benefits to learners attending whole day kindergarten experiences is clear. From the data above, it is apparent that Latina/o children are still more likely to attend a half day program, and the percentage increased from one year to the next. Due to the increase of Latina/o children attending half-day programs from 2003 to 2006, we have recommended CPS make this a priority. However, to date, there has been no effort in trying to alleviate this crisis. Thus, young Latina/o children are dis-enfranchised by simplistic solutions to complex schooling policies. Half-day Kindergarten is a simple solution that

gives schools the chance to allow double the number of children in Kindergarten. However, this is a complex issue because we cannot determine the impact that the difference of having 2.5 hours of Kindergarten, versus 4 or 6 hours for every child. Unfortunately, there are too many variables to consider, so while the research shows how beneficial a productive and positive Kindergarten experience is for all children, policy makers continue to discount the critical need for full day programs. When analyzing the issue of half day Kindergarten being predominately Latina/o within a CRT and LatCrit framework that is rooted in history, we are reminded of the initial policies implemented in the Southwest that required Mexican children to have a shorter school day than their white counterparts (Menchaca, 1995). Although the policies are quite different, the practices of exclusion and injustice are similar.

Another critical issue was the long waiting lists of children whose parents and guardians have sought out options for early childhood education, but were left with empty promises. The neighborhood with the longest list in 2004-2005 was Belmont-Cragin, with 424 children on the waiting list. Belmont-Cragin is a predominately Latina/o neighborhood. There was a third shift preschool program established in 2006 that did provide space for approximately 250 of these 424 children on the waiting list in Belmont-Cragin. However, over 2,500 children from Latina/o neighborhoods still remained on the waiting list during the 2004-2005 school year. Although CPS shared the total number of children on waiting lists by neighborhood, there was no way for us to gather any demographic data, thus, we based our analysis on the demographics of the neighborhoods on the list. However, one of the responses we received from CPS spoke directly to the number of children residing in predominately Latina/o neighborhoods who are on the waiting list.

In 2004-2005, the report statistics show that there were 2,605 students on the waiting lists in predominantly Hispanic communities. Among those 2,605 students, approximately 170 students were screened for entrance into public programs. Current waiting lists are not yet available as programs are still screening and evaluating. (CPS, 2006)

While CRT has been applied to analyze early childhood curriculum (Mendoza & Reese, 2001), specifically children's picture books through critical literacy studies, we were unable to find a CRT and/or LatCrit analysis of early childhood education policy and access. We have thought through our findings using the tenets of CRT/LatCrit to deconstruct the data discussed above. First, the lack of options for Latina/o families evident in the small percentage of Child Parent Centers and full day Kindergarten programs as well as the thousands of children on waiting lists speaks to the structural inequities present in CPS that are not working to provide a foundation for many Latina/o children. The public school system should serve the needs of the community. Despite the rapid growth of Latina/o students in Chicago, program development in CPS has not kept pace. More importantly, the lack of progress in providing early childhood options over the last few years is even a bigger dilemma. Altogether these findings related to the early experiences for Latina/o children in CPS need attention. As CRT/LatCrit scholars, we have

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a responsibility to take action and to call on others to act. We have worked with communities around Chicago to voice their concerns and fight for change and we are calling on the CPS community to work as advocates, using their power to make real, sustained, systemic change.

Assessment

Accountability policies have resulted in high stakes decisions for Latina/o students in CPS to determine grade promotion, graduation, access to enrichment or specialized programs, selective schools and access to higher education. Under *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB), all schools are required to assess the academic progress of all students. Of particular concern to Latina/o students is the assessment administered to English Language Learners (ELL). CPS has several tests they administer to determine adequate yearly progress (AYP) of students. For ELL students, it was the Illinois Measure of Annual Growth in English (IMAGE). This assessment was to be used to determine English proficiency of students who are ELL for instructional purposes. However, this assessment was being used to determine AYP for this particular subgroup of Latina/o students. The IMAGE had been criticized by bilingual and ESL professionals because it was not developed to meet federal standards for assessing English language proficiency or academic achievement for ELL students.

The IMAGE has been phased out (due to some of the concerns outlined above) and has been replaced with the Assessing Communication and Comprehension in English from State to State (ACCESS). This assessment more accurately identifies a students' ability to perform educational tasks in English. Of major concern was the fact that the IMAGE and ACCESS assessments were not comparable or interchangeable, therefore, limiting the systems ability to accurately measure progress for ELL students.

CRT and LatCrit inform our perspective by recognizing that English is the dominant and accepted language of CPS. Students who fall outside of this constructed norm are seen as lacking or deficient; and therefore, are relegated to the margins of CPS. CRT and LatCrit allow us to "center" ELL students, changing the manner in which we frame, name and address issues for Latina/o ELL students. Rather than viewing Spanish language as a deficit, we perceive Latina/o students and families as possessing an asset (Spanish language). A critical examination of the issue of language uncovers the reality that CPS subjects ELL students to systemic discrimination, and in turn, has created and sustained a pattern of racial (language) exclusion, having a detrimental impact on Latina/o students.

From a CRT/LatCrit perspective, we see that assessments are used to make important decisions about Latina/o student's futures regarding their education, and overall access to academic options. The assessments used to determine English proficiency are not being applied and implemented appropriately. This misapplication has several deleterious effects such as tracking students into special education classes, grade retention, and limited/no access to gifted programs. Language can be

seen as a tool for oppression. If you do not possess knowledge in the dominant/preferred language (English) then one essentially is viewed as “less than.” Language is viewed on a hierarchy that is based on white social norms. This hierarchy is constructed and controlled by the dominant or ruling “protectors” of knowledge.

In the 2004 and 2005 schools years, approximately fifty-percent of Latina/o students in CPS feel well below the 50% range for reading on standardized tests. In 2005, only 54% of predominantly Latina/o schools met AYP for math and 57% of these schools were identified as in need of school improvement. Also in 2005, only 3 of the 20 predominantly Latina/o schools examined in the study met and/or exceeded reading and math state averages (40.2% and 30.7% respectively).

On the surface, the statistics described above speak to students’ limited ability to excel academically. Taking a more critical approach, one could argue the lack of consideration on behalf of the school district in administering assessments that take into account students cultural, social and class differences. “The ‘norm’ of Whiteness always positioned the cultures of Mexicans and Latinas/os as deficit while also ignoring the political-economic context” (Villenas & Deyhle, 1999, p. 422). Many tests administered to students within the U.S. are based on white social norms. Students who do not achieve well on these tests are not necessarily behind academically, most likely that have simply not assimilated into the American “melting pot.” We must also consider the fact that Latina/o students are “overwhelmingly the recipients of low teacher expectations and are consequently tracked, placed in low-level classes and receive ‘dull and boring’ curriculums” (Villenas & Deyhle, 1999, p. 415). Therefore, it is not the students who need improvement, but rather the assessments themselves that are in need of change. For Latinas/os, education is not simply about academics; “*educacion*” encompasses the education of the child as a whole, including their overall well-being, manners and moral values (Valdes, 1996).

Ladson-Billings (1995) discusses assessment within a CRT in education framework. Her discussion of assessment speaks to the ways in which deficit models get played out, in the form of a validation and rationalism. “For the critical race theorist, intelligence testing has been a movement to legitimize African American student deficiency under the guise of scientific rationalism” (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 19). On the same token, bilingual and Spanish monolingual Latina/o students continue to be tested in US schools with tests that only measure their academic abilities in their second language and culture (Lipman, 2000), leading to the legitimization of deficiency that Ladson-Billings (1995) describes for African-Americans. As Valdes and Figueroa (1994) found, “the monolingual English test cannot measure the student’s knowledge in their native language” (Valdes & Figueroa, 1994, p. 87).

Bilingual Education

A national study was conducted to provide a statistical portrait comparing elementary schools with high concentrations of limited-English-proficient (LEP) students, to schools with fewer or no LEP students to examine differences that may affect schools’ abilities to meet No Child Left Behind requirements (Cosentino de

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Cohen, Deterding, & Clewell, 2005). The results indicate that nearly 70% of the nation's limited-English-proficient (LEP) students are attending 10% of the schools. Teachers in schools with High-LEP concentrations are more likely than those in other schools to have provisional, emergency, or temporary certification, and new teachers are substantially more likely to be uncertified. However, low LEP schools lagged behind in LEP focused professional training for general education teachers. Teachers in High-LEP schools are more likely to be racially and ethnically diverse than that of low-LEP or No-LEP schools and more likely to be male.

Although nationally schools districts have reported an increase in the Latina/o and ELL/Spanish student population in their schools, Chicago public schools report a slight decrease during the years 2003-2004 (48,953) and 2004-2005 (47,495). Of the total ELL population in CPS, Spanish speaking ELLs represented 83% of this population during the 2003-2004 school year and 84% the following year. However, the number of bilingual teachers in that same year (2004-2005) who were fully qualified and certified to teach this group of students was only 1,407. This disproportionate ratio of teachers to students provides approximately one certified bilingual teacher to every 49 bilingual students.

The Promotion Policy approved by CPS in 1998 requires that ELL students in the school system meet the academic criteria established for them in order to graduate or be promoted to the next grade. Students with three full years in the Transitional Bilingual Education (TBE) program are considered fourth year students and must participate in citywide assessments for general education students (CPS Board Report, 1998). Although these children may not have the English fluency to successfully take the exam, the level of English language proficiency is not taken into consideration by CPS for taking standardized exams.

With the mobility of ELL students entering and leaving the TBE program with frequency within a short period of time (usually three years) and enrolling in school at varying ages, ability, and educational background experiences, it is not possible to provide an accurate assessment of student progress using system wide, aggregate mean averages for only English language proficiency, as CPS currently does. A more appropriate manner in which to assess ELL students' yearly academic progress is to individually track students over a period of time, including their participation in the TBE program as well as their progress in the general education program, their progress in English language proficiency as well as academic growth in the content areas. The progress of students in the bilingual program would help gain insight on the effectiveness of the policies and practices.

CRT and LatCrit help us deconstruct the lack of services for children who are ELL as an issue rooted in a sociopolitical and historical space. Spanish speaking abilities have been historically misunderstood as disabilities, leaving Latina/o students at a disadvantage. Furthermore, policies and practices that school districts have adopted in response to Latina/o student presence have historically been grounded in ideologies that see our children as disposable (Darder, 2002). This disregard for Spanish speaking abilities and Latina/o students experience and culture continues

to permeate public education in the US. Latina/o students who are learning English as a second language today continue to suffer from this misunderstanding and lack of appreciation of Spanish language skills. English immersion policies stemming from California are spreading across the country. Latina/os have fought countless grassroots battles regarding the preservation of the Spanish language through quality bilingual education programs that will simultaneously teach essential English language skills (Diaz-Soto, 1997). However, the bilingual education wars continue, and the Latina/o population of the US continues to increase while the English immersion advocates continue to disregard the voice of Latina/os wanting and needing to preserve their language.

In Chicago, the Transitional Bilingual Education (TBE) has been used for over twenty years, and little program development has occurred in the area of bilingual education. For example, if a high school student in CPS is proficient in Spanish, has limited English language skills and has advanced academic skills, there are no honors, advanced placement, or gifted education classes or programs for this student and her counterparts. For Spanish dominant students in grades K-8 who are advanced academically, the options are not much more than for high school students, with only a few gifted bilingual centers for an overwhelming number of students and long waiting lists (S. Thorton, personal communication, July 10, 2003).

Using Chicago schools as her point of analysis, Lipman (2000) argues that “[b]ilingual education in Chicago has become effectively a curriculum of English acquisition, squeezing out support for literacy in students’ first language and delegitimizing that language in favor of English” (pp. 118-119). More importantly, Lipman ties the lack of support for Spanish fluent children in Chicago to the issue of devaluing the identities of these very children. She argues that the cultural politics informing the English immersion policies and the devaluing of Spanish in Chicago speaks to a devaluing of Latina/o and immigrant identities altogether, labeling these bilingual and/or immigrant children as “other” (Lipman, 2000). We argue that the problem of inappropriate bilingual education models lies deep within class and race issues and it will take a strong grassroots reform to help reshape the current model and perception of bilingual education in our country. Latinas/os have been penalized for bringing an asset into the public school buildings across the US. Generation after generation, Latinas/os who are Spanish language dominant have had to deal with the negative response from the public schools regarding their language. Schools in the US have not embraced the Spanish language and therefore have failed to embrace a significant part of the Latina/o identity.

Within this context and with anti-immigrant, anti-Latina/o, and English-only policies making schools an increasingly greater contested terrain, issues of identification, belonging, and who imagines community and how they do so become political, not just cultural, concerns. (Walsh, 2000, p. 98)

Dropout

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), more than one-fifth (22.4%) of Hispanics aged 16 to 24 were dropouts (Jones & Bou-Waked, 2007). Latinas/os dropout at a higher rate than their African-American or White peers (NCES, 2005). Dropout rates for Latinas/os is problematic on a National as well as local level. The high number of Latina/o students that dropout of CPS has been a persistent, long-term problem. Previous research conducted on Latina/o students tells us that students do not simply dropout, instead they are “pushed” out and/or not afforded opportunities to become connected and engaged in school (Flores-Gonzalez, 2002; Valenzuela, 1999).

CPS reports that 11% of students drop out of high school. However, graduation rates for Latina/os are at 76%. According to these figures, 13% of students are simply not accounted for. What happens to these students? Although we have progressed in the area of Latinas/os who remain in school and graduate, it has been at a dangerously slow pace (Gonzalez & Portiollos, 2007). Further, of the 26,000 students who dropped out of CPS in 2005, only 4,000 were provided opportunities to re-enter the CPS system (CPS data). The fact that 22,000 students are provided no alternative educational options through CPS speaks to its systemic shortcomings. What happens to these 22,000 students during the school year? How do the schools they drop out of perceive these students? How does the school system account for its failure to retain and provide opportunities for these young people?

CRT and LatCrit inform our discussion on dropout in various ways. Of emphasis here, is the manner in which it helps us to recognize policies and school systems that view Latina/o students in a particular way. Many times, it is policies that marginalize Latinas/os in the area of education, while simultaneously portraying them as criminals (Gonzalez & Portillos, 2007). Students that are perceived as “worthy” are provided guidance, support and assistance back into the educational system, while Latinas/os are “conceptualized as uneducatable looting criminals” (Gonzalez & Portillos, 2007, p.251), being provided little guidance from the schools.

Schools, similar to society, are founded on a hierarchical system. Students, regardless of the assets (language, culture, etc.) they bring to the school door, are seen as “deficient” if they do not contribute to the status quo (white supremacy). Students who resist the white supremacist master script curriculum (Ladson-Billings, 1995) are perceived as failures. From a CRT/LatCrit perspective, this very resistance is not seen as failure, instead it is viewed as a necessary tool to the academic success of Latina/o students.

We also must situate the dropout issue in an historical context. Latina/o histories and struggles for the most part are completely ignored in US schools. Some of the struggles of Latinas/os in the US that have been silenced include the discussion surrounding the political status of Puerto Rico, the forced sterilization of Latinas (Hartman, 1995), the segregation of Mexican students (Menchaca, 1995) and the illegal deportation of half a million Mexicans, many who were US citizens, known

as Operation Wet Back, to name a few. Students whose experiences are not valued by their teachers, peers and educational institutions are less likely to become connected to school. “For too long, the histories, experiences, cultures, and languages of students of color have been devalued, misinterpreted, or omitted within formal educational settings” (Delgado-Bernal, 2002, p. 105). CRT and LatCrit implore us to recognize the experiences of Latina/o students as a valuable contribution to educational institutions. Emphasizing Latina/o students as ‘holders and creators of knowledge’ (Delgado-Bernal, 2002).

Closing Discussion: Struggle and Hope for Latinas/os in CPS

CRT and LatCrit have aided in identifying and naming the structural inequities that exist within the Chicago Public School system. The data we shared illustrates the manner in which Latina/o students are regarded by CPS, based on their race as well as the intersections with other forms of subordination such as language. This is only the first step in recognizing and understanding the struggle that ensues for Latinas/os attempting to acquire a basic education. Working within the CRT/LatCrit tenets, we are encouraged to challenge these dominant ideologies, recognizing the flaws inherent to the public school system, not our Latina/o children.

The specific context of CPS has been the focus of this paper, but it is critical to place this research within the larger social context to highlight the historical sociopolitical context. Latina/o students have been segregated with the implementation of education policies at the local, state and federal level. It is this deep rooted racism and classism that provides the space for the policies of separate and unequal, thus, segregated schools, are ever present throughout the US, particularly in inner cities where there are high concentrations of Latinas/os. Not only are Latinas/os still learning in segregated and less equipped schools, we are more likely to learn in segregated schools today than thirty years ago (Anyon, 1997; Orfield, 1996; Spring, 1991). Furthermore, the majority of bilingual children or ELLs (as they have recently been labeled) are Latina/o, thus the issues surrounding bilingual education policies and linguistic rights has been a story of struggle and hope.

In 2002, approximately 36 percent of CPS students were Latina/o; 80 percent of these students attend schools that had a Latina/o population of 85 percent or higher. This disproportion shows similar race patterns that were present pre-Civil Rights Movement. The issue of Latinas/os being segregated in public schools is not limited to Chicago, as it is also present across the country. The inferior education provided to Latinas/os, both in Chicago and in the US at large, reproduces the social inequities that have been plaguing our communities for generations.

Orfield (2001) found that in 1998-1999, at least three out of every four Latina/o students or 75.6 percent were enrolled in schools with 50-100 percent minority populations, similar to the educational experiences, of African American students (70.2%). More important is the trend of (re)segregation plaguing children of color across the US. From 1968 through 1999 the percentage of Latina/os learning in

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segregated schools has increased every school year (Orfield, 2001). School segregation reproduces the reality of separate and unequal education for youth of color and speaks to the lack of attention the courts pay to the lived realities of struggle in impoverished public schools in the U.S.

We continue to see a consistent variable in school districts failing our children; they are predominately Latina/o and/or African American (Noguera, 2003). CPS enrollment is over 90% students of color and over 80% receive free or reduced lunch. We must continue to expose the structural inequities that are clear from the data we have collected and analyzed but we must also highlight the critical impact community resistance has had within this structure. Despite the persistent educational inequities in CPS it is key to highlight the community resistance and discuss the agency of Latina/os and others fighting for their right to quality public education. The school system in Chicago has been changed by collective resistance rooted in the community. Community based organizations, parents, students, churches and Local School Councils have stood up when CPS proposes changes that may negatively affect learning opportunities. While CPS policies and practices affect the community, the actions of the community also have an impact on these very policies and practices. The tensions are ongoing and the issues shift on a daily basis, however, certain episodes of community resistance have left a dent in the system. We are arguing that this dent is a space that will continue to grow through the ongoing community involvement for educational change that speaks to the needs of the children.

While Latina/o communities in Chicago have historically joined African Americans in fighting for quality education, there were several movements in the 1970s and 1980s that stemmed from Latina/o activism in Chicago. Lipman (2004) explains that in the 1970s and 1980s several studies revealed the high drop out rates among Latinas/os. “In 1984, Latina/o parents marched on Clemente High School in the largely Puerto Rican Humboldt Park community demanding action on the Latina/o dropout problem and on gang violence in the schools” (Lipman, 2004, p. 34). This march was only the first step for these activists as the march was followed by a public hearing and the creation of a task force designed to address the dropout problem within the Latina/o community. We must continue to address the dropout/pushout issue, and CRT/LatCrit can aid in our understanding of the “pushout” phenomenon among Latina/o students.

Additionally, a parent based group in Chicago, Parents United for Responsible Education (PURE) resisted the promotion policies in CPS that relied on a local standardized test—the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS)—which national test experts found flawed (www.pureparents.org, PURE, 1999). In 1999 PURE filed a discrimination complaint under the Civil Rights Act of 1965 regarding the misuse of ITBS scores in Chicago:

The policy uses ITBS scores as a pass-fail barrier in a wide range of critical educational decisions. Such other useful information as student attendance, academic performance, and faculty recommendations are readily available. These

factors are indeed considered when a student successfully exceeds the cut-off score, but then only in a negative sense; low attendance or a failing grade will also bar that student from graduation or send him or her to summer school. Stated simply, attendance and academic performance can hurt a student, but they cannot help him or her. (PURE, 1999, ¶ 4)

Advocacy initiated by community members demonstrates the power parents and communities hold in regards to education for their children.

More currently, the community of Little Village challenged CPS after promises for a new school in the community were stalled. According to Stovall (2005), while CPS postponed the creation of the high school in the predominately Mexican community of Little Village, two new high schools were erected, Northside Preparatory High School on the North side of the city and Walter Payton High School near downtown. The community not only stood up for what they believed in, they stepped forward and took this issue to heart and fought endlessly for this school. In 2001, a group of community activists—including a high school student and a grandmother—went on a hunger strike for 19 days. The hunger strikers developed an advisory board that negotiated the development of the school with the CPS central office, provided oversight of the design teams and played an active role in principal selection. The school in Little Village opened in the fall of 2005 and consists of four small schools. The authors have had the privilege to hear students and teachers at the school for social justice present on their experience teaching and learning in a school designed to empower our youth.

Altogether, the struggle for education equity is accompanied with the hope for transformation and stories of victory. The stories of victory should be highlighted to continue to keep hope and transformation alive in schools. While children in schools struggle to find themselves as developing creatures let us begin to foster the caring, respectful and thought provoking spaces that will help them flourish into the best self they have to offer. Without addressing the ideologies that drive school practices and policies that in turn infect the lives of children, no real change is possible. Thus, discussions of the social constructions of race, as well as the discussions of how class manifests itself within this white, capitalist, patriarchal nation is integral in the conversations of the ideologies of teaching and learning within this nation.

CRT and LatCrit serve as important tools to critically examine the educational landscape present for Latina/o students. CRT in general, and LatCrit more specifically aid in naming and framing the inequitable educational systems that are currently charged with educating Latina/o children across the country. Furthermore, the educational experiences of Latina/o and African-American students too often consist of schools with limited funding, resources and investment in our youth. We must work together to recognize our common concerns and goals, while also supporting each other on issues specific to our respective communities. CRT and LatCrit allow for the recognition of our common experiences of oppression and subordination while simultaneously recognizing and supporting areas of divergence.

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As CRT and LatCrit scholars, it is our obligation to continue to expose the inequities inherent in educational systems, at the same time acting upon opportunities for change.

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