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Foreword to *Revisiting Education in the New Latino Diaspora*

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Foreword

Amanda Morales

You don't see me.... You see your idea of me.... As you evaluate my brown skin, my long dark hair, and my ambiguous facial features, you say, "What are you? I know you are something...."

As a young girl, growing up in an otherwise all-White German farming community in western Kansas, I embodied the identities of both my Mexican American father and my Irish and Native American mother. We lived on the edge of town, where the paved roads ended and the dirt roads crunched and crackled as the occasional truck drove by. My father, Francisco Silos Rodriguez, a native Texan, was born into a migrant farm working family, and spent the large majority of his childhood and young adult years traveling across the country, harvesting a wide variety of crops. From May to January, he and his family followed the harvest as far north as Washington State to pick cherries and as far west as Arizona to pick cotton. However, it was the sugar beets of Kansas that brought him and my mother together.

My mother grew up the daughter of an orphan from the "wrong side of town." As a fiery, strong-willed young woman, she met my father at a street dance. And at the age of 16, she was bound and determined to marry a tall, dark, and handsome Hispanic man. My father liked that idea too. So he and his brother (who later married her sister) became the only two Latinos within a 30-mile radius. Dad did everything with great passion and joy. He worked hard and loved to sing and play the guitar. He was a quiet and proud man, yet he did his fair share of fighting. He was a boxer and found great joy in the opportunity to "put folks in their place," especially when he was outnumbered.

Given the reputation of my father and my uncle in my hometown, my family's socioeconomic status, and my multiethnic background, social life in school was interesting. My identity was concurrently novel and inconsequential. I remember feeling that I was a little different, but not less than; a self-concept I developed primarily as a tribute to my mother. Because my father worked long hours as a laborer, she was my primary cultural influence. She raised my sisters and me to have faith and to value all aspects of our heritage.

Despite the rocky start my father had in the community (a rockiness I recognize more as an adult), most folks did their best to get along with my family. However, even though he applied for many positions within the community, my father was never able to get a nonlaborer or an eight-to-five job that would allow him to be home more often.

As the only children of color in the community, my family's cultural heritage was not understood or accommodated for in schools. As was common during the early 1980s, teachers in the High Plains rarely encountered families like ours, and as a result, we assimilated to the majority culture in many ways. I really did feel as though I fit in among my peers. This, coupled with the fact that I didn't have distinctly "ethnic" features, meant life for me in this small farm town was relatively typical.

I was a bit of a dreamer and a free spirit with little interest in rural life. Upon graduation, I took the giant leap to higher education, and enrolled at a community college three hours away. Despite the fact that I was overwhelmed with fear and doubt, I was determined to make my own way and to prove that I could be successful. With no vehicle of my own to get me back home, I felt like home was worlds away.

In what I can best describe as directionless serendipity, after completing my Associate's degree I enrolled at a state university and flourished with the support and mentorship of the McNair Scholars program. Then I married and moved to Texas after completing my BA. After a few years of coming "back home" for holidays and special occasions, including when 'going home' stopped being from Texas to my hometown and started being from Manhattan Kansas (where I had started a PhD program) to home, I began to notice some changes. With each visit, I saw more and more ethnic diversity. Changes in farming and industry in the area, particularly the expansion of the local feedlot, meant young faces of various shades joined the aging, all-White faces I was long accustomed to seeing.

I also heard stories of troublesome interactions that my little sister was having in junior high and high school. She described racial comments from some classmates and even a few teachers. Despite her being only 10 years younger than I, it was surprising how different her socialization and schooling experiences were from mine.

To be sure, a little of this may have been a product of our personalities. She was quiet and reserved, with the personality of my father. However, it was more than just a question of social adjustment; I think something more profound had changed. Instead of the local Latino community being just two “settled-out” sugar beet pickers (i.e., my dad and uncle) and their families, there were now more people who looked like us (i.e., the New Latino Diaspora) and there was more of a xenophobic response.

I share this short autobiography because I think it ties together so much of this book. In Chapter 1, Hamann and Harklau (reprising their chapter for the 2010 *Handbook on Latinos and Education*) acknowledge that in emphasizing the “new” of the New Latino Diaspora (NLD) the first edition of *Education in the New Latino Diaspora* (Wortham, Murillo, & Hamann, 2002) made invisible Latinos like my dad and uncle who, per the construct of the NLD, settled in Kansas earlier than the NLD narrative describes. Yet as the comparison of my northwestern Kansas childhood and my sister’s illuminates, something did change back where I am from. There is a NLD, and there was a reaction to it by more established populations that also impacted how my family was viewed.

My autobiography has a minor echo in Bruening’s chapter (Chapter 2). My sisters and I weren’t English language learners (like the students Bruening describes) but we were part of a “low-incidence” population for which the rest of the community did not need to reorganize itself much, a point that changed when the Latino population grew. I’m not undocumented like the student who offers the poignant testimonio in Urrieta, Kolano, and Jo chapter (Chapter 3), but like that student, I don’t like how my purported success (I earned my PhD from Kansas State University (K-State) in 2011) sometimes seems to excuse the system as fair and the way I am regarded and included/excluded as unproblematic. Though my K–12 experience did not match the disciplining and channeling of students of color into a school-to-prison pipeline (like what Raible & Irizarry describe in Chapter 4), that does not mean their account does not resonate with me. Now as a teacher

educator at K-State and one long-involved with that university's BESITOS program (further described by Herrera & Holmes in Chapter 12), I have worked with first-generation Latino college students who have made it to campus almost in spite of what K-12 teachers and peers said of them, rather than because of the support of many. At K-State, I have also watched many close colleagues design teacher education travel-study efforts to Mexico and more recently Ecuador, as Mexico's drug violence has led our university to stop sending students to that country, which makes Chapters 15 and 16 (both accounts of NLD teachers' travel-study) sound quite familiar. I am committed to helping create a teacher workforce ready to be responsive to and supportive of the NLD, even as I concede that that remains an uphill battle.

In this volume, *Revisiting Education in the New Latino Diaspora*, Hamann, Wortham, and Murillo have once again, successfully drawn on the knowledge, expertise, and innovative work of a wide range of veteran and emerging scholars who speak passionately and authentically. The editors' dedication to understanding the nuanced experiences of Latinos living in the United States and Latin America and the complex social, economic, and political implications of the NLD is visible in both the breadth and depth of this volume. For example, I had never particularly thought about the in/appropriateness of Spanish as a foreign language teachers as intermediaries between schools and Latino families (Harklau & Colomer's Chapter 8), early childhood education in the NLD (Adair's Chapter 11), how policy could be more progressive than practice (as in Lowenhaupt's example from Wisconsin [Chapter 13]), how communities might try to recruit "better" immigrants than Latinos (as Lynn achingly describes in Chapter 6), nor how teacher education challenges in Kansas have their echo in the Pacific Northwest (as in Contreras, Stritikus, Torres, & O'Reilly Diaz's Chapter 10 about Washington State). Nor had I thought about the particular lens of Latin American-descent adoptees being raised in mixed race families (Flores-Koulish's Chapter 7) or how indigenous populations from Mexico might have a different perspective on being part of the NLD than others encompassed by this label (see Leco Thomas' Chapter 5). Even as much of this volume seemed familiar, the descriptions and analyses kept drawing my attention to something new.

Broken into three sections, the authors set the context for this edition in the first section by providing a reflective critique of the 2002 edition and then by "whetting the appetite" of the reader for what is

to come in the following two sections. The second section, “Actors and Improvisational Local Practice,” engages the reader in authentic personal narratives and thought-provoking, historical and contemporary analyses of research in multiple contexts. Consistent with the education policy and practice book series’ breach from traditional policy implementation studies, these chapters start with small cases, accounts, autobiographies, and so forth, and from there turn their attention to policy. In the third section, “Existing Infrastructure Responds,,: the authors examine how the NLD fares and/or is conceptualized in formal education policy, particularly those concerned with teacher preparation, both in-service and preservice.

As a product of the early Latino diaspora of the 1970s in Kansas, I am able to see my family’s experiences represented in many of the narratives and perspectives shared in this book. As a researcher and practitioner working in a NLD state, I feel this volume will be an essential addition to my library, as each chapter raises many critical points for consideration. As I think about K-State’s challenges and opportunities as we work with schools and school districts, I suspect I will draw a lot from the chapters by University of Pennsylvania colleagues (Chapters 9 and 14) as we consider what the academy can and should do to support improved education in the NLD. As I think about the descriptive statistics shared in Chapter 17 about the NLD continuing to get larger and more established (even as new immigration tapers off) and in Chapter 1 that suggests Latino high school completion rates lag those of other populations in NLD states, I find myself concurrently both invigorated and angry. This matters for more and more kids and more and more places. It is not yet as good/successful as it needs to be. I don’t say that purely abstractly, nor about some obscure population. I am a sister of a student who struggled in the NLD; I am the teacher of teachers who will or will not adequately understand and support NLD students and parents. And I am a mom who lives in Kansas. My children, my most sacred and intense connection to the future, are getting a public education as part of the NLD. I join the various authors here in declaring: “We have to get this right.” You must see me.

Reference

Wortham, S., Hamann, E., & Murillo, E. (2002). *Education in the New Latino Diaspora*. Westport, CT: Ablex.