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# Preparing Nebraska Teachers to See Demographic Change As an Opportunity

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**Preparing Nebraska Teachers to See Demographic Change  
As an Opportunity:  
Reflections on Immigrant Integration and the Role of Government,  
Communities and Institutions**

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**Abstract**

This paper reflects on an effort to support Nebraska teachers, both practicing and preservice, to become more ready for the state’s changing demographics, notably for the growth in Latino and Spanish-speaking populations. To that end, it describes an effort funded by the University of Nebraska-Lincoln’s Initiative on Teaching and Learning Excellence called, “Schooling in Nebraska’s Demographically Transitioning Communities.” That initiative makes mentors of practicing teachers who have enrolled in summer courses in second language acquisition. In the fall of 2006, ten such teachers mentored 44 undergraduates enrolled in TEAC 331 “Cultural Foundation of American Education” or TEAC 413A “Second Language Acquisition.” This paper reports on that fall 2006 experience. (The experience will be repeated in the Fall of 2007.) However, before describing that experience or the methodology we have used to analyze it, it is worth tracing briefly both how the demographics of Nebraska’s schools are changing and why that change suggests a teacher training need. Those are the goals of the next segment.

**Keywords:** Nebraska, Teachers, SLA, Latino students

**Nebraska’s Students Are Changing, But Its Teachers Are Not**

According to the Nebraska Department of Education’s *2005-06 State of the Schools Report*, there were 32,795 Hispanic students enrolled in Nebraska schools, a 459% increase from the 1990-91 tally of 7,147 and more than the entire 1980 Census total count for Hispanics in Nebraska (28,000).<sup>1</sup> Five Nebraska districts were majority Hispanic—Schuyler Grade Schools (76%), Lexington (74.7%), Madison (60.8%) Schuyler Central High School (52.1%), and South Sioux City (51.4%),—while several other districts also had large Hispanic enrollments. (See Table 1, next page). Comprising 11.5% of Nebraska’s overall 2005-06 enrollment, Hispanics were the second largest racial/ethnic group in Nebraska schools, behind ‘White, not Hispanic’ (221,252) and ahead of ‘Black, not Hispanic’ (21,605), ‘Asian / Pacific Islanders’ (5,193), and ‘American Indian / Alaskan Native’ (4,703).

In 2005-06, Hispanics made up the second largest portion of the teacher population, but at 227 out of 23,587 (just ahead of 226 ‘Black, not Hispanic’ teachers) Hispanic teachers

constituted less than 1% of Nebraska's teacher workforce, a workforce that was 97.6% 'White, not Hispanic'. In short, the number of Hispanic students in Nebraska is growing quickly, but they (and other student populations) have little access to Hispanic teachers. This is especially true in non-metropolitan districts; 11 of the 12 districts identified in Table 1 (next page) as having significant Hispanic student populations but no Hispanic teachers were non-metropolitan. South Sioux City was the one metropolitan district with no Hispanic teachers.

If Nebraska's new Latino student population is trying to learn mainly from non-Latinos, we should ask two intertwined questions: (1) How well are Latino students faring in Nebraska? and (2) How ready are Nebraska teachers for Latino students? Answering the first question is risky using State department collected data, because only 4th, 8th, and 11th grade assessment data are available and only in writing is that assessment data broken out by race and ethnicity. Writing is also the only topic area in which all Nebraska districts use the same assessment. Looking at writing scores, it appears that, like Latino student populations elsewhere in the U.S. (Garcia 2001), Nebraska's Latinos are not faring as well as some other student populations. According to the state report card, 27.50% of Hispanic 4th graders, 21.61% of 8th graders, and 22.61% of 11th graders did not meet standard in writing in 2005-06.<sup>ii</sup> This compares to the state average of 18.19% of all 4th graders, 13.92% of all 8th graders, and 10.00% of all 11th graders not meeting standard. If one looks only at the non-passing rate among white students, an achievement gap becomes starker; 15.33% of non-Hispanic Whites did not meet standard at the 4th grade level (making a 12.17% White/Hispanic achievement gap), 11.62% of non-Hispanic Whites did not meet standard at the 8th grade level (making a 9.99% White/Hispanic achievement gap), and just 8.26% of non-Hispanic Whites did not meet or exceed standard (making a 14.35% White/Hispanic achievement gap).

There are hazards to noting that Latinos are not faring as well in school as other populations, because such reporting can risk reifying a kind of lower achievement stereotype of Latinos. It is important for us to note that Latinos can fare well at school, or phrased another way, that schools can meet the needs of Latino students as well as any other group (e.g., Callahan and Gándara 2004; Ernst, Statzner, and Trueba 1994; Lucas 1997; Lucas, Henze, and Donato 1990; Mehan et al. 1996; Pugach 1998; Reyes, Scribner, and Scribner, 1999; Romo and Falbo, 1996; Walqui 2000). In other words, because Latino populations should be able to fare as well in Nebraska schools as other populations, the fact that so far they do not, demand inquiry.

One starting point for such inquiry is to look at who teaches them and the contexts within which they encounter schooling. While clearly Latino teachers can teach Latino students poorly and non-Latino teachers can teach Latinos well, there does seem to be some explanatory power to the communication mismatch hypothesis. Per that hypothesis, schooling in which teachers know, understand, and value a student's cultural background is more likely to be successful than when teacher and student bring different cultural backgrounds and expectations (Au and Jordan 1981, Heath 1983, Erickson 1987).

**Table 1**  
**Nebraska Districts with Significant Hispanic Student Populations**  
**2005-06**

District name	Hispanic enrollment number	Hispanic enrollment proportion	Number of Hispanic teachers	Total number of teachers
Schuyler Grade School*	664	78.2	0	63
Lexington*	2,055	74.7	5	183
Madison*	340	60.8	0	45
Schuyler Central HS*	232	52.1	0	33
South Sioux City	1,839	51.4	0	261
Minitare*	83	38.4	0	19
Wakefield*	162	35.9	1	36
Grand Island*	2,860	34.7	8	554
Crete*	510	33.2	2	107
Scottsbluff	852	32.9	4	183
West Point*	204	30.6	0	53
Gering*	532	26.4	5	132
Harvard*	69	25.9	0	23
Morrill*	100	22.8	0	35
Tecumseh*	95	22.6	0	33
Columbus*	770	22.2	2	224
Omaha	9,918	21.2	73	3,180
Norfolk*	834	20.9	1	292
Mitchell*	121	19.5	1	46
Cozad*	188	19.1	0	71
Fremont*	644	14.4	0	288
Ralston	452	14.2	1	200
Hastings*	451	14.1	0	224
North Platte*	442	11.4	4	263
Bellevue	676	7.3	9	601

Lincoln	2,012	6.2	42	2,312
Millard	657	3.1	5	1,309

\* Outside of a metropolitan county. (Consistent with Vogt, et al. [2006], Cass, Dakota, Dixon, Douglas, Lancaster, Sarpy, Saunders, Seward, and Washington are the nine Nebraska counties, out of 93, that are metropolitan.)

Meier and Stewart (1991) have noted a persistent correlation between the number of Latino educators in a district and how well Latinos perform in it. They posit that this relationship exists because in districts with higher numbers of Latino teachers, Latinos have accrued more community capital and schooling processes reflect the imprint of that capital. In other words, in places where Latinos can be professionally successful, as demonstrated by their very hiring and retention in educational jobs, there is a general know-how and expectation that Latinos will be successful. There is a vicious circle. Conversely, in districts with Latino teacher proportions much lower than that of the student body, Meier and Stewart posit that there is less knowledge about how to meet the needs of Latino students and less political pressure to do it.

Dentler and Hafner (1997) drew a similar conclusion from their study of 11 districts' responses to rapid growth in their newcomer populations. In the three districts (of 11) that saw their standardized test scores improve in the face of change, there was an away-from-the-classroom expertise about how to meet the needs of newcomers that complemented the knowledge of classroom teachers. This away-from-the-classroom knowledge meant that professional development coordination was purposeful and coherent, that liaison activities to newcomer parents were thoughtful and responsive, and that student counseling was knowledgeable and appropriate.

A key question then is: Do Nebraska teachers have the knowledge, support, and predisposition to meet the needs of Latino newcomers as well as other student populations? Given that few teachers in Nebraska come from a Latino background, we can rephrase our knowledge question to ask: In their preservice or in-service training, do Nebraska teachers have a chance to develop knowledge of a community (i.e., Latinos) that they do not usually know by biography? Do professional training standards, state expectations, and preparatory entities like the teacher education program of which, we are part of at UNL, convey the expectation that preservice and in-service teachers need to develop or expand skill sets to meet the needs of Latino newcomers?

Although we posit that the program we describe momentarily is a small-scale exception, in the main, we do not find much in Nebraska teacher preparation and continued professional development that make us sanguine about our state's near-term capacity to respond effectively in terms of education to its current demographic transformation. Nebraska's main teacher preparation response to the presence of newcomers is the creation of an ESL endorsement (which means the challenges or new opportunities presented by newcomers are conceptualized as entirely linguistic in nature), and only teachers seeking an ESL endorsement need to worry about coursework in ESL. The only ESL training that Nebraska content area teachers learn is the one which they pursue per their own volition. Excepting preparation activities that might be embedded in coursework that has different formal ends, the closest most Nebraska educators get in their regular preservice training to preparation for newcomers is a 3-credit hour Human

Relations Training (HRT) course that is usually called “Multicultural Education.”

### **The ITLE Project**

In the fall of 2006, the project, “Schooling in Nebraska’s Demographically Transitioning Communities,” placed University of Nebraska- Lincoln (UNL) undergraduate students in small mentor / mentee teams with practicing educators throughout the state. Funded by UNL’s Initiative on Teaching and Learning Excellence (ITLE), the project aims were to engage undergraduate education majors, in-service teachers, and faculty in the Department of Teaching, Learning and Teacher Education in discussions of immigration, migration, and transnationalism in Nebraska and their impact on K-12 schooling. By doing so, we hoped to create new and compelling ways to engage undergraduates and advance their learning, to consider Nebraska dynamics in relation to similar phenomena (and resulting responses) elsewhere, and to improve our teaching. Toward that end we recruited ten mentor teachers, practicing educators with experience teaching in linguistically and culturally diverse schools, from our summer 2006 graduate courses, TEAC 840D: Schooling in Demographically Transitioning Communities and TEAC 890P: Teaching in Demographically Transitioning Communities. Eight mentors were recruited from the course rolls, and two additional mentors, known for their work with newcomers and Native American youth, were recruited from previous coursework with one of us. It turned out that all 10 mentors were women. Seven were white; two were Latina; and one was Native American. Two had lived overseas in Latin America and elsewhere.

Both fall 2006 courses—TEAC 331 Cultural Foundations of American Education and TEAC 413A Second Language Acquisition—included project goals and requirements in their course syllabi. As the enrollment and aim of each course differed slightly, so, too did the goals and requirements. The TEAC 331 syllabus stated, for example: “There are three goals for this course that are explicitly attached to the ITLE grant:

- To help undergraduates explicitly consider how demographic changes in Nebraska might affect their futures as educators and how they can prepare for these new demographic realities;
- To connect current undergraduates to practicing educators;
- To increase the likelihood of undergraduates completing their degrees by highlighting the links between current course taking and future job responsibilities.

TEAC 331 ITLE coursework was worth 15 points (out of 100) on students’ final grades.

In TEAC 413A the three project goals were:

1. To facilitate ELL teacher candidates' connections between theories of second language acquisition and educational practice.
2. To help ELL teacher candidates explicitly consider how demographic changes in Nebraska might affect their futures as educators and how they can prepare for these new

demographic realities.

3. To connect ELL teacher candidates to practicing educators who can serve as mentors with experience and expertise in teaching in multilingual / multicultural settings.

Requirements included electronic discussion board participation (15 points) and a reflection paper (10 points) based on group discussions, contact with the mentor and, when possible, site visits to the mentors' educational institution. In this respect, TEAC 413A ITLE participation constituted 25% of the final grade.

Online discussions that joined students from classes, plus mentors and faculty, took place through UNL's online course management system, Blackboard, through a dedicated Blackboard site. Two types of discussion boards ran concurrently: a large group discussion board and ten small group discussion boards. Access to small-group boards were limited to a mentor, her three to six mentees and the course instructors; all participants were able to access the large-group board. Guidelines to undergraduates in both classes for participation in the discussion boards were:

1. Post at least 5 times throughout the semester.
2. Postings should be made over the course of the semester. Postings made all in one week do not meet these criteria.
3. As with our other discussions, please read your group mates' postings and respond to what they have written. In this way, we can have a rich and authentic dialogue. Try, whenever possible, to make connections between your postings, course readings and site visits.
4. At a minimum, post a total of 2,500 words.

We drafted six topic questions to open the large-group discussion board and one subsequent question was added as discussions took some participants in a new direction. In total, seven discussion threads comprised the large group discussions. We chose topic questions that addressed our course readings (some of which were shared by each of the two courses) and the educational issues involved with demographic change. The questions were:

1. Many rural Nebraska counties are seeing their Anglo populations decline and age (with fewer Anglos having school age children). In the face of this change, how can Nebraska schools assure community engagement and continued stable funding?
2. Here's a college of education recruitment and retention question: As the number of Latino, Asian, Middle Eastern, and African students in the Midwest grows, how can teacher education programs (like UNL's) assure that these populations are well represented in terms of those who pursue teaching careers in Nebraska?
3. Given that Latino, African American, and Native American students currently fare less well (on average) than do Anglo and Asian American students in Nebraska, what changes in teacher education (at UNL or elsewhere) would you recommend to help those currently enrolled in teacher education programs work more effectively with Latino,

African American, and Native American students?

4. Between 1994-95 and 2004-05, Tecumseh NE Public Schools saw their Latino enrollment quadruple (from 15 to 73) while the Anglo student population declined about an eighth (from 364 to 319). Between 2001-02 and 2004-05, Tecumseh's ELL enrollment increased from 15.27% to 22.67% (compared to 5.78 % of state enrollment writ large). These changes were largely related to changes in the labor force at a local poultry processing plant (from local, long-time Anglo residents to more Latino newcomers). In response to these changes Tecumseh invested in multicultural teacher training and professional development. In 2006, however, the poultry plant significantly reduced its workforce, transferring most employees out of the community to Waverly, an hour away. This local labor change has reduced enrollments (particularly reducing Latino enrollments) creating a budget challenge and reducing the need for some of the second language education capacity and multicultural education capacity that had been developed (although ELLs and Latinos are still a less successful population in Tecumseh than the Anglo population). How would you help Tecumseh negotiate this current financial challenge? What should be the goals of schooling in Tecumseh be, given that local employment seems cyclic and vulnerable to booms and busts? If Tecumseh needs to scale back its school offerings, what should it be most careful to hold onto? Why?
5. Considering the language loss of Navajo (described in the McCarty book read in 331) and/or the second generation's language loss and related cultural, ethnic, and racial identity issues (described in the Goldstein article read in 413A), what do you think about the phenomenon of students losing their native language (or the native language of their parents)? What are the implications for Nebraska of language loss by immigrant newcomers? What are the implications for Nebraska of the language loss among many local Native Americans?
6. As a current or future Nebraska teacher, how do you expect demographic changes in our state to affect your teaching? How will the school(s) you work in differ from the one(s) you attended as a student?
7. (Mid-semester addition) In another discussion board, ITLE mentor Karen Graff (from Westside) raised the issue of Nebraska's Brain Drain: "[S]ince we tend to have a loyal community some of the families will support the schools for the sake of their grandchildren. I see this changing as the population in general is more mobile. Young families often leave Omaha for job opportunities. I think we are seeing this trend nationally. I know some are concerned about "brain-drain" from Nebraska. I've been in debates with educators who insist that we continue to teach NE history as a major portion of our curriculum (in fourth grade). Some say it will instill pride in the state and encourage students to stay here after graduation. While I agree that students should learn about Nebraska's place in American history I sincerely doubt that learning about its history in fourth grade will make them want to stay here as adults." At this point, Brain Drain is a major 'demographic change' policy concern. So, I've set it up to be a direct topic of discussion. Fire away.

Participation in the online discussions picked up as the semester progressed, and in the large-group discussion alone, there were nearly 250 posts. Those posts, plus end-of-semester surveys of mentors and students (See Appendices A and B) are our main data sources for the findings which follow.

### **Findings**

Throughout their discussions and reflections, undergraduates grappled to make sense of both demographic change in their communities and what that change would mean for them as educators. As anticipated, the overwhelming majority of our students self-identified as white, and most, like Jacob, reported little experience with diversity. “I am from an extremely small school, my graduating class was only 56, and we had absolutely no diversity” (Jacob, online discussion). However, in our online discussions it became apparent that demographic change, though new to many, was lived experience to some. A number of undergraduates told the stories of their communities’ experience with shifting populations. Mostly we heard stories of Nebraska but also South Dakota, California, and Iowa among others. Brenna, from South Dakota noted, “Today, I would almost be considered a minority back home” (online discussion). Even those from culturally and linguistically homogeneous communities, though, were seeing and experiencing demographic change in Lincoln and its schools, as Jamie observed in the large group discussion.

As I think back to the schools I grew up, they do not compare to the ones I will teach in. We had no such thing as an English Language Learner classroom and there was no curriculum adjustment for the ELL students. However, now we see a need for ELL educators and we see the curriculum and standards being re-written to accommodate to the needs of the ELL students. It is clear that we have come a long way and the schools and community are trying to better serve the minority population, but I do think we still have a long way to go. I have been opened to a world of diversity, which is far better than the world I once lived in. I am not saying this transition has been easy, but I have grown to appreciate and love others from different cultures. That is why I think we, as educators, need to not only be aware of cultural differences, but we need to understand different cultures and reflect this in our teaching! (Jamie, online discussion)

Overall, participants reported a new or expanded awareness of demographic change in Nebraska communities and schools. Lindsey provided an example in her reflection paper:

The ITLE project continued to show me new ideas and different perspectives of teaching and also of student learning. There are so many issues and concerns regarding the future of the ESL program that I had never considered. One of our topics regarding the minority population in smaller, English centered communities particularly interested me because it related to my hometown community. The question at hand was “how are we going to keep the community involved in the

school system in order to keep the Anglo population while incorporating minorities?" In all actuality, we did not find the perfect solution but it is difficult to say if one exists. It became evident that these small town communities need to have full support for the students including their cultures, backgrounds, and aspirations. (Lindsey, reflection paper)

Discussions of demographic change in participants' communities often lead to conversations on the potential and observed impact of change on schooling. In particular, undergraduates questioned mentors on the possible and appropriate roles for teachers of newcomer and minority students. Mickie, a mentor with more than twenty years experience as a school counselor and three years as an ELL teacher, responded by explaining her role as that of a teacher and an advocate.

The pressures, some subtle and some obvious, on ELL kids to become "American" are tremendous, and some of it is internal because they constantly see and hear messages telling them that the way to have status and influence lies in being like those they see around them. It is a very difficult issue, and your observation about the dynamics we see at parent-teacher conferences is right on. I see very few parents without their sons/daughters with them, which I really like, but often the kids are clearly in the power chair because of language. For this reason, I speak to the parent as directly as I can (even if it is through a translator) rather than allowing the child to do the translation for me. I make it a point to ask the parent's advice in how to best motivate their child, and also ask the parents what I can do to be of help to them in educating their young ones. This is a laborious process when going through a translator, but the alternative of excluding the parent as the expert just isn't right. To add a personal strategy that seems like a small thing but has, I think, some impact--I make it a point to learn at least basic greetings in all the languages of my students just so that I can use them with parents. I have had reactions ranging from surprise to deep belly laughs (bad accent in some languages) to tears of appreciation...[A] Dinka-speaking mom from Sudan held my hand and cried and told me through the translator that I was the first white person in the U.S. to ever say a word to her in her language. (Mickie, online discussion)

Advice, stories, and strategies from mentors seemed to have a positive impact on mentees as Ashley explained in her reflection paper.

I feel like I was able to connect with other teachers and pre-service teachers on an informal basis where I could learn new perspectives and ideas as well as share my own. I felt as though I had an entire staff of colleagues to work with, communicate with, and get opinions on topics that really pertain to the ELL teaching community. The ITLE Project and group discussion board also helped

me to learn more about teaching implications for teaching SLA [second language acquisition] in Nebraska. It also helped me learn to think much more deeply about multicultural and diversity issues on a local basis and what things like poultry plant employee cut may mean to a local elementary school, and particularly the ELL Program within it. Something I will take with me into teaching is the implication for teaching because of language loss for immigrant newcomers and local ethnic groups, such as encouragement of cultural diversity and better community involvement for cultural issues. Being involved in this ITLE Project and the discussion group made me want to be involved in recruitment and retention, language acquisition, and cultural awareness in the community I will teach in the future. (Ashley, reflection paper).

The following exchange highlights explicit professional advice giving between mentor and mentee. Intriguingly, the mentee in this instance subsequently decided to pursue ESL endorsement in addition to her pursuit of a secondary social studies certification.

Hi, my name is Kristin. I am a Social Studies Education major and I am a sophomore. Have you always taught in [name of district]? Where did you go to school? I know that Social Sciences is a very popular route to take at Lincoln, and I know that most of us are afraid that we will not be able to get a job when we get out! Do you have any advice for us? Sorry it took me so long [to post]!  
Thanks, Kristin

Hi Kristin--it's great that you're a social studies person. My best advice is to get into classrooms in Lincoln as quickly as possible, meeting as many practicing teachers as you can. The recommendations of teachers within the [school] system carry weight with principals who do the actual hiring of new teachers. Since you are a sophomore and are quite a long way from your student teaching, I suggest finding some classrooms where you can volunteer, even if only for one or two hours a week every semester. It can help you nail down a student teaching spot with someone you know you can learn from, and someone you like, and can also give you great experience. We have had several volunteers at [my middle school] who have gone on to be fantastic student teachers for us. If you volunteer, ask that you NOT be used to grade papers, collate and staple, etc. Ask to work with kids and to help in the trenches. Then, when that semester ends, the experience goes directly onto your resume. Mickie

Although the exchange above does not directly highlight working with neither Latinos nor ELLs, it did help cement the relationship between mentor and mentee and subsequent exchanges were explicitly about being ready for demographic change.

## **Discussion**

The ITLE project met its immediate goal of engaging undergraduates and practicing teachers in conversations about demographic change in Nebraska. In online discussions, face-to-face mentor meetings, and course readings and assignments, project participants discussed their growing awareness of change and the observed and potential impact of change on communities and schools. Engagement led to raised awareness of various issues involved with demographic change from education policy to heritage language maintenance to border control. Engagement also yielded mentors' and professors' advice, stories, and strategies for preservice teachers to take with them into their own future classrooms. Of course, whether that advice will ultimately be heeded is a longitudinal question that cannot be answered at this point. We take the quality, tenor, and sincerity of mentors' questions to be a promising sign. Yet conversely, we also suspect that if it were not for our program, that our preservice teachers could go through their whole undergraduate education without substantive engagement with these themes.

Through our participation in Blackboard discussions and our analysis of various feedback documents, we identify a particular importance that the mentor / mentee relationship had for preservice teachers as they grappled with the ideas and theories of their course readings and their own biographies. Having a mentor who was a practicing teacher deeply involved in the day-to-day workings of school provided mentees a substantive connection to the profession of teaching, a profession that nearly all mentees were seriously considering. (The TEAC 331 class included 24 teacher education candidates, one history major, and four students majoring in speech pathology; all the TEAC 413A students were in teacher ed.) Mentors were a knowledgeable source of information on how things worked in a classroom today, which complemented professors' and authors' more abstract emphases on theory, method, and foundations, rather than a particular site and context. That said, not all mentors were equally successful neither at engaging students nor with sharing expertise on meeting the needs of newcomers. (Those with ESL training, personnel bicultural experience, and/or multiple years of direct experience at a demographically diverse school seemed most successful.)

Our first-year successes engaging pre-service teachers as mentees and in-service teachers as mentors, has given us confidence to expand our ITLE implementation into an even more integral part of coursework in TEAC 331 and TEAC 413A in the fall of 2007. For example, it now seems safe for us to assume that preservice teachers can learn a lot from and be engaged by their mentors. Consequently, all TEAC 331 students will be required to meet with their mentors in 2007 and to carry out a writing assignment (separate from Blackboard assignments) that has them integrating data from their interaction with mentors and from their readings.

But we are also learning from some of the reluctance (or perhaps 'lack of familiarity' is a better turn of phrase) that we encountered in 2006. Figuring that most TEAC 413A students enrolled in that class already with some notion that they needed to be ready to respond to K-12 students' linguistic diversity (TEAC 413A is part of the ESL endorsement pathway), it is worth paying particular attention to some of the TEAC 331 students. For some of them, much of what we were bringing up was new. We have already noted that there were exchanges in which students noted that they were aware of changes going on in their hometowns, but there were just as many exchanges like the one noted from Jacob where students reported little awareness of

newcomers. At one level, this is a logical. While Nebraska's Latino population is growing fast; it is not equal growth in all parts of the state. Some places are negotiating significant enrollment changes, others are seeing very little change at all. We believe all our teacher education candidates need to consider how changes in who is going to school suggest a need for rethinking how school is organized and carried out. For some of our students, this just articulates an idea that was already in the back of their mind (as they too have witnessed changes in 'home'), but for others we were the first messengers.

Coming back to the most overarching consideration that grounds our paper—the applied consideration of what teacher education changes are necessary to assure Nebraska schools in the future better serve Latino students than they currently do—we acknowledge that our effort is quite modest. A handful of current teachers, teachers who are also graduate students and people interested in helping with the negotiation of demographic change, are getting to share their professional perspectives and experiences with future teachers. Thinking about the paucity of Latino teachers noted in Table 1, unfortunately none in our preservice cohorts were Nebraska Latinos, none could describe autobiographically how welcoming Nebraska schools felt to Latinos (be the first generation or fourth). Consequently, our effort, at its best, established (a) that preservice teachers were willing to engage with these topics, that (b) they were receptive to working with mentors, and that (c) maybe, just maybe, they were developing dispositions and understandings that would help future Latino students fare well in their classes and/or that would aide them in collaborating with future Latino colleagues.

## **Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup> As Oboler (1995) lays out in intriguing detail, there is much controversy and disagreement about what to call U.S. populations who can trace ancestry to Latin America. We find Hayes-Bautista and Chapa's (1987) definition of Latinos as all those who trace ancestry to populations targeted by the neo-colonialism of the Monroe Doctrine to be compelling. In this document, we use 'Hispanic' when we are quoting sources (like the Census and Nebraska Department of Education) that use that term and we use Latino when we are not directly quoting or paraphrasing.

<sup>2</sup> Depending on the grade-level, between 3.5 and 7% of Hispanics were not assessed in writing. It is unclear how these students would have fared, but it seems plausible that many were exempted from the test because they were new arrivals. It is unlikely that many such students would have fared well on an English writing assessment.

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## Appendix A

### Survey of Undergraduates

Student's Name \_\_\_\_\_ Mentor's Name \_\_\_\_\_

Feedback form RE: Fall '06 TEAC 413A / 813A students' participation in the "Schooling in Nebraska's Demographically Transitioning Communities" ITLE grant

The three goals of the ITLE program were:

- To facilitate your connections between theories of second language acquisition and educational practice.
- To help you explicitly consider how demographic changes in Nebraska might affect their futures as educators and how they can prepare for these new demographic realities.
- To connect you to practicing educators who can serve as mentors with experience and expertise in teaching in multilingual / multicultural settings. The questions that follow ask about these six dimensions of the program.

The following questions ask you to talk about your participation in the project in light of these goals. Thank you for taking the time to answer these questions; your input will help us evaluate and improve the project.

1. Which course readings did you find most relevant / helpful to your participation in the ITLE project? Please explain briefly why you found these readings relevant / helpful.

2. About a third of the way through the semester you were matched with a mentor.

A. Have you had a chance to meet with your mentor? Yes \_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_. If 'yes' when/where did you meet?

B. Have you exchanged emails with your mentor and/or interacted with her on a Blackboard discussion board? Yes \_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_. If 'yes' briefly describe what your electronic interaction has been:

- C. Has your interaction with your mentor seemed relevant to building your understanding and/or skills related to demographic change in schools? Yes \_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_. If 'yes', please describe:
- D. Describe how satisfactory/unsatisfactory your interaction has been with your mentor and explain why (Note, your mentors will not have access to this feedback, except as general feedback that Dr. Reeves and Dr. Hamann synthesize from these answers.)
3. You were asked to participate on a separate ITLE Blackboard (TEAC 399/413A/813A).
- A. Please describe your experiences and opinions regarding the whole group section of that Blackboard
- B. Please describe your experiences and opinions regarding the small group section of that Blackboard (the part led by your mentor)
4. Do you think the ITLE program in any way increases the likelihood that you will continue at UNL through degree completion? Explain.
5. Would you say that through the various program activities your understandings of changing demographics in Nebraska's school enrollment and your skills regarding how to respond successfully to that increasing diversity have changed? Explain.
6. Any other comments about the ITLE program

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## Appendix B

### Survey of Mentors

#### “Schooling in Nebraska’s Demographically Transitioning Communities” ITLE Project Mentor Feedback

Mentor’s Name \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for serving as a mentor! We appreciate the time you devoted to your mentees and the ITLE project. In order to improve and strengthen the project, we would like to get your feedback. Please fill out this evaluation and return it to either Jenelle ([jreeves2@unl.edu](mailto:jreeves2@unl.edu)) or Ted ([ehamann2@unl.edu](mailto:ehamann2@unl.edu)).

Please list the students in your mentor group (and CIRCLE the names of any mentees who you met with in person):

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.

Counting forward from when we identified your mentees, how many hours per week do you estimate you spent on the ITLE project this fall (e.g., participating in the online discussions, meeting with mentees, sending e-mails to mentees, etc.)?

#### Section A: The Online Discussions

One major component of the ITLE project was participation in online discussions. Describe your participation with these discussions.

Were you satisfied with the depth and scope of the six questions on the large group discussion board? Please explain.

What additional questions would you have liked posted?

Were you able to discuss your work with schooling in demographically transitioning communities with students (and other mentors) in the online

discussions? Please elaborate.

Were you satisfied with students' participation and engagement in the online discussions? Please explain.

Did you use the small group (with your mentor group only) discussion board? If not, why not? If so, was the small group discussion board forum useful? What suggestions do you have for improving / modifying the online discussions?

### **Section B: Meeting Your Mentees**

One objective of the ITLE project was to put teacher education students in touch with mentors not only in the virtual world of online discussions but also in face-to-face meetings.

Were your mentees able to meet with you? Which mentees met with you and which did not? (Your responses are confidential and will not impact students' class grades)

Please describe the nature of your meetings with mentees (e.g., mentees observed your classroom; mentees met you for coffee, etc.)

Did you find the face-to-face meetings with your mentees useful? Please elaborate.

What suggestions do you have for facilitating and improving face-to-face meetings with mentees?

### **Section C: Overall Impressions**

A major goal of the ITLE project was to help undergraduates explicitly consider how demographic changes in Nebraska might affect their futures as educators and how they can prepare for these new demographic realities. Did you see evidence of students engaging with this goal? Please elaborate.

After your work with the teacher education students, what recommendations / suggestions do you have for better preparing pre-service teachers to work in demographically transitioning communities?

Another major goal of the ITLE program is to promote retention of undergraduate students by helping them identify links between their studies and their future lives and careers. Were there any elements of your experience with the ITLE program that you think helped students link their studies to their futures? Do you think this program encouraged students to continue their

enrollment at UNL?

In what ways (if any) has your participation in ITLE informed, changed, or impacted your own work with demographically transitioning schools and communities?

What suggestions / recommendations do you have for improving / strengthening the ITLE project?

Thank you for your input.

Jenelle and Ted