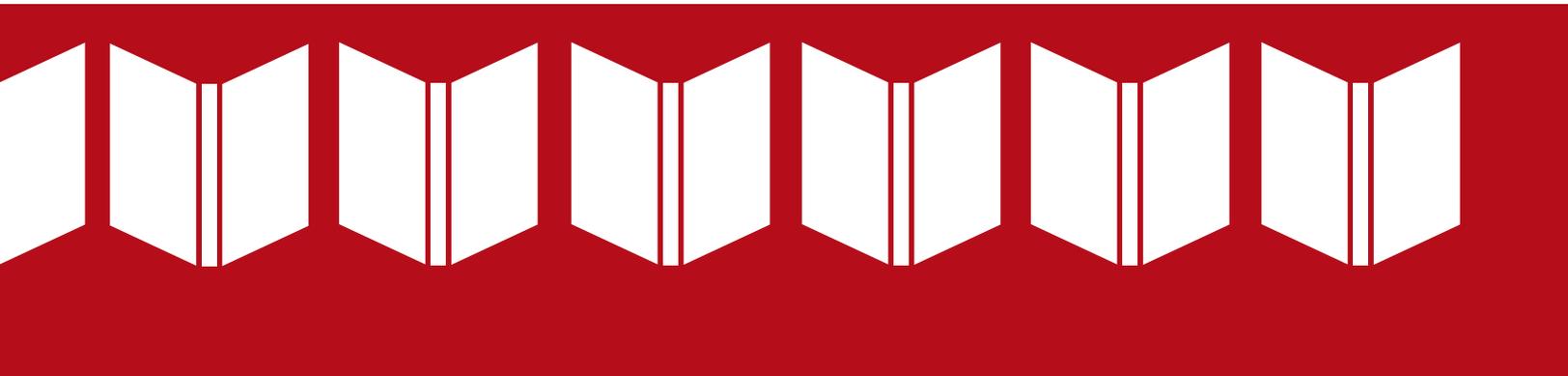


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# educational considerations

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# ***Kansas: Themes in Multicultural Adult Education Resonating Across the Nation***

**Jeff Zacharakis, Gabriela Díaz de Sabatés, and Dianne Glass, Guest Editors**

Our traditional curriculum, disconnected from life, centered on words emptied of the reality they are meant to represent, lacking in concrete activity, could never develop a critical consciousness. Indeed its own naïve dependence, on high sounding phrases, reliance on rote, and tendency of abstractness actually intensified our naiveté. (Paulo Freire, 1980, p. 37)

Across the country in our communities, our schools, and our businesses, we are experiencing a cultural shift as new immigrants of many ethnic backgrounds arrive speaking different languages and adhering to different beliefs. From the beginning, the United States has always been a destination for people around the world seeking a better life. These new immigrants often enter our society and begin at the lowest rung of the ladder. Historically, it typically takes several generations before new immigrants and their families are fully integrated into mainstream society. We are not—and have never been—a homogeneous society, and it is this diversity that lies at the heart of this nation's cultural experience. We argue that it is also this diversity that has created and shaped our enduring democracy.

This special issue of *Educational Considerations* focuses on the experience that many new immigrants face when they arrive in Kansas and the United States, and the role that adult education plays in assisting them to become contributing and valuable citizens. Though the articles in this issue center on Kansas, it is clear as we travel across the country that what is expressed in these articles is not unique from the rest of the United States. For many rural communities in the Midwest and the Plains, if it were not for these new immigrants, industries and businesses would be unable to fulfill their labor needs, and their local economies would dry up, resulting in further depopulation of these already sparsely populated regions. An argument might be made that most new immigrants come to places like Liberal, Kansas, in search of opportunity, and because they come there is opportunity that otherwise would not exist.

What might be most exciting about this special theme issue is that all of the articles are written by practicing adult educators and/or adults who have experienced firsthand what it means to emigrate to this country. Almost all of the voices that you will hear throughout these articles have had little or no formal academic training, resulting in some rough edges but honest and powerful messages. Because we are inspired by Freire's words as quoted above, this issue is written as an intellectual treatise that is connected to the reality that both adult learners and educators experience every day. The words written here are informed and shaped by a reality that is often lost in academic jargon, complex sentences, and high-sounding phrases. Though we do not claim that the authors of these articles have achieved critical consciousness, through the process of reflection and putting their words down on paper we hope that you will see a glimpse—mere moments—where a new understanding is achieved.

We begin with an overview of adult learning in Kansas, followed by a depiction of how this state fits into the globalization of capital, technology, and labor. The first two articles not only set the stage for Kansas, they also situate Kansas within the larger context of the United States. The second part of this issue is composed of three articles where voices of adult learners and their children are allowed to speak for themselves with little or no editing. These translated transcriptions are testimonies of raw but eloquent voices that we hope will strike at the core of our readers' preconceptions and experiences. The final and third part is a collection of five case studies written by educators working in adult learning centers across Kansas. These are the voices of adult educators who may or may not have studied adult education theory but are called upon daily to perform an invaluable service to their communities and their students. They are given sparse budgets to work with and asked to achieve great miracles. While we, as editors, did work with each of the authors as they collected data for their case studies, their experiences are accurately preserved in their final reports. These case studies are all different, reflecting the unique realities of their communities, their students, and their challenges. While we argue that what is happening in Kansas is not all that dissimilar to other places in the country, these case studies show that adult learning in Kansas is complex and varied.

We hope that you enjoy reading these articles and are moved by some of the voices that you hear. We also welcome your comments, stories, and insight. These articles merely represent a snapshot of how our country is changing and the role adult education is playing.

## **Endnotes**

Freire, P. (1980). *Education for Critical Consciousness*. New York: Continuum.

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***Dianne Glass has been involved in adult education since 1973 when she taught her first Adult Basic Education (ABE) class. She joined the Kansas Department of Education in 1992 as an Education Program Consultant. In July 1999, her unit was transferred to the Kansas Board of Regents. In August, 2000, she became State Director of Adult Education.***

# Diversity in Kansas Adult Education Programs

**Dianne Glass**

Kansas is not typically considered a state with a great deal of diversity. In the past few years, however, Kansas has become more ethnically diverse. Kansas adult education programs could serve as a bellwether for diversity across Kansas.

With the advent of federally funded adult education programs in Kansas in the late 1960s and early 1970s, Kansas adult education programs served a largely White population (71% in 1970).<sup>1</sup> However, the percentages of African Americans (20%) and Native Americans (6%) receiving services in adult education programs were higher than the percentages of African Americans and Native Americans in the general population. These two examples of ethnic diversity were limited almost exclusively to programs in larger urban areas such as Wichita, Kansas City, and Topeka for African American participants and to programs in northeast Kansas for Native American participants. Kansas adult education programs in the late 1960s and early 1970s were also characterized by other limitations on diversity. The overwhelming majority of participants were females (75% in 1970), with the majority of participants in the 25 to 44 years age group.

By the late 1970s, political refugees from Southeast Asia began to impact the diversity of adult education in Kansas. However, the thousands of Southeast Asian refugees and their families in Kansas adult education programs from 1975 to 1990 were served almost exclusively in programs located in communities with beef packing facilities—Liberal, Garden City, Dodge City, and Emporia.

As late as 1988, Asians, primarily Southeast Asians, in the towns listed above, composed the largest non-White population in Kansas adult education programs; and the influx of political refugees impacted not only the ethnicity of Kansas adult education, but also the gender. By 1990, the percentage of male participants had increased to almost 40% of the adult education population. The political refugees from Southeast Asia took full advantage of the English as a Second Language (ESL) classes provided by Kansas adult education programs and of the other opportunities historically afforded to hard-working immigrants. As these refugees left the beef packing plants, a new group of immigrants quickly replaced them. By 1994, Hispanics, living and working primarily in the same communities with beef packing facilities, became the largest non-White population in Kansas adult education programs. In 1994, Hispanics comprised 17% of adult learners served while African Americans (not of Hispanic origin) comprised 16%. Asians comprised 10%, and White (not of Hispanic origin) comprised only 53%.

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A new Hispanic workforce that replaced the former beef packing plant employees from Southeast Asia revitalized these communities and changed the complexion of their local adult education programs. Programs which had become expert at providing quality ESL services to Asians quickly became experts at providing quality ESL services to Hispanics. Within a few years, these programs expanded their other educational programs to serve former ESL learners who had progressed to taking Adult Basic Education (ABE) and Adult Secondary Education (ASE) classes. Unlike the political refugee population from Southeast Asia, which was served almost exclusively in adult education programs in communities with beef packing facilities, the Hispanic immigrant population quickly began to appear in adult education programs in other communities within the state. By Fiscal Year 2007 (FY07), Hispanics comprised 78% of the population of learners in the Garden City Community College Adult Education Program, 90% of the population of learners in the Seward County Community College Adult Education Program in Liberal, and 91% of the adult learner population in the Dodge City Community College Adult Education Program. Hispanics were also the largest ethnic group (55%) served in the Kansas City suburban Johnson County Community College Project Finish program, the largest adult education program in the state located at the opposite end of the state from the Dodge City, Garden City, and Liberal programs. In FY07, Hispanics comprised 41% of the total population served in the Wichita Area Technical College program (the second largest program in the state), 40% of the total population served in the Kansas City Kansas Community College program, and 35% of the total population served in the Kaw Area Technical School program in Topeka. Even the Wichita Indochinese, Inc. program, which was originally established to aid in the resettlement of political refugees from Asia, reported that Hispanics comprised 40% of the population of its FY07 adult learners.

In Fiscal Year 2002 (FY02), Hispanics became the largest ethnic group served in Kansas adult education programs. By the end of FY07, Hispanics comprised 41% of the total adult education population in Kansas while Whites (not of Hispanic origin) comprised 37%. African Americans (not of Hispanic origin) comprised 11%. Asians comprised 8%, and Native Americans comprised 3%—a significant demographic shift within only 30 years.

In addition to the dramatic shift in ethnicity, Kansas adult education programs have also seen a major shift in the age of learners served and an increase in the percentage of males served. The “typical” learner in an adult education program in Kansas in 1970 was a White female who was approximately 34 years old. In FY07, the “typical” learner was younger and non-White. While the learner was still more likely to be female (57%), she was also younger. In FY07, 46% of all adult learners served were in the 16-24 year age group compared to less than 30% in that age group in 1970, and this “typical” learner is more likely to be Hispanic (41%) than any other ethnic group.

In addition to the shift in the adult learner population since 1970, Kansas adult education directors, individuals who lead local adult education programs, have become more diverse. In 1990, of the 32 local program directors, 18 were male, and 14 were female. All were White. In 2007, of the 31 local program directors, 23 are female, and only 8 are male. Of these, one director is Hispanic, and one is Native American; two are African American, and one is Asian.

**Table**  
**Number of African American Participants in Local Adult Education Programs**  
**for Fiscal Years 2005 and 2007 by Location**

Location	Participants by Fiscal Year (FY)		Difference by Number and Percentage
	FY05	FY07	
Emporia	13	114	101 (877%)
Garden City	3	17	14 (567%)
Liberal	3	9	6 (300%)

A potential impact on the increasing diversity of adult learners in Kansas adult education programs is the newest group of political refugees, Somalis, especially Somali Bantus. These new immigrants are settling in the same communities as the Southeast Asian refugees did in the 1980s and are seeking the same employment opportunities in the beef packing plants. The table above provides a comparison between the number of African Americans served in three local adult education programs in FY05 and FY07. The increase in the numbers and percentages is due almost exclusively to the Somalis.

The history of Kansas adult education indicates that an increasingly diverse population will be served by Kansas programs and that local economies depend upon the adult education centers providing adult learners, whoever they are, excellent educational services. Adult basic education in Kansas reflects the changing diversity of the workforce in Kansas, and therefore it is necessary to improve the state's human capital essential for continued economic growth. Political leaders, economists, policymakers, and business leaders would benefit by keeping an eye on what's happening in Kansas adult education programs.

**Endnote**

<sup>1</sup> All data used in this paper are from Kansas Adult Education Annual Reports, Fiscal Years 1975–2007.

# The Changing Fabric of Adult Basic Education in Kansas

Jeff Zacharakis

Globalization is changing the demographic fabric of a world in which people are not only mobilizing in search of jobs and economic opportunity but so are technology and capital mobilizing in search of cheap labor. In this competitive business environment, it is often easier to transfer technology and capital to developing countries where there is cheap, unskilled labor than to invest in new infrastructure in a locale where labor and environmental costs are high (Korsgaard, 1997). Likewise, as native population growth in most Western and developed countries is either stagnant or declining, there is great demand for new immigrants to fill the workforce and maintain their industrial engines. To prove this point, one has only to drive through many Midwestern and Plains states where, if it were not for immigration, many of their towns would have dried up and faded away.

An argument can be made that immigration is revitalizing these rural communities by providing a pool of cheap labor and thereby making these communities more competitive in the global marketplace. By educating new immigrants and the undereducated, are we diminishing their ability to be employable, or are we creating opportunities so they can move up on society's economic ladder? Is the purpose of Adult Basic Education (ABE) and English as a Second Language (ESL) classes merely to raise the technical skills of adult learners, or is it to provide opportunities for these learners to become culturally, politically, and linguistically literate whereby they can be more self-sufficient with less opportunity of being exploited? One fundamental paradox in this scenario is whether ABE and ESL classes should be promoted for their benefits to civil society or for the individual technical goals of reading, writing, and arithmetic?

UNESCO (2006) reported that about 771 million people aged 15 and above were illiterate, and for every illiterate man there were approximately two illiterate women. Illiteracy is linked not only to poverty and exploitation, it also is a barrier to "economic, social, and political participation and development, especially in today's knowledge society" (p.2). Yet being literate and having formal education, whether high school or college, does not guarantee a pathway out of poverty. For the least educated, literacy and basic education are both a personal accomplishment and a tool of industrial development. Some argue that this industrial development, of which education and training are an integral part, has led to the degradation and erosion of communities and culture all under the guise of individual and collective emancipation (Finger and Asun, 1999). Often adult education in many communities results in out-migration as newly educated adults

search for greater opportunity. Unfortunately, without these technical tools, people are more likely to be exploited and relegated to low wage and unskilled jobs. This is especially true for women and, more specifically, women of color.

Hence it is difficult to look at ABE and literacy education separate from local politics and economics. In Kansas as well as the rest of the United States, there is the ever present if not growing need for ABE and ESL classes. Limited funding is one of biggest hurdles to offering more classes. The vast majority of these adult learning centers have strong ties to their local community, working out of buildings where their students have easy access and feel comfortable. Though many of these centers are affiliated with the local school district or community college, their financial base is typically independent of their host institution. Anecdotally, I have never visited a well-endowed adult education center that had excess money to hire more teachers and purchase new equipment and furniture. Most operate at a shoestring level reflecting the value that society places on their mission and their students. Hence, my perspective is that in order to understand ABE and ESL education we must frame it within industrial development and its value within the context of the underclass, minority groups, and immigrants. As Youngman (2000) argued, "it is doubtful whether literacy workers, industrial training officers and lecturers of part-time university courses often consider the commonalities in their work of helping adults to develop particular skills, knowledge, values and attitudes [required for industrial development]" (p.5).

Is it the role of adult education to redress the problems of social inequality, or to affirm the status quo? Historically adult educators, dating back to Jane Addams' vision of education in settlement houses (Addams, 1892), Highlander Folk School's efforts to empower coal miners in Appalachia and train southern civil rights workers (Horton, 1989), and Freire's (1970) literacy training with indigenous people in northeast Brazil, have seen themselves as facilitators of greater social opportunity. Yet as Youngman (2000) pointed out:

In the 1980s...it was counterposed by the radical tradition which applied the theories of reproduction and resistance to adult education. From this perspective, most adult education activities reinforced class and gender inequalities but there were examples of programmes with a collective purpose which deliberately sought to overcome them through the transformation of capitalist society.

Since the mid-1980s the dominant paradigm of adult education in the North [primarily the United States and Western Europe] has been that of meeting the needs of business and industry, and the radical, social action tradition has been in retreat. (pp. 155-156)

In other words, as long as adult education focuses on individual skill building, the inherent social inequities of the status quo will be preserved. The alternative is to develop collective educational strategies and approaches that seek to enhance a community's capacity and skills.

As traditional industries such as steel and automobile factories relocate around the world, the argument is continually being made in the United States that physical labor is being replaced by intellectual labor (Friedman, 2000; Reich, 1992). Still this industrial transformation has not eliminated the need for unskilled labor to perform jobs that cannot be exported, such as farm labor, lawn care, hotel-motel service, and meatpacking. Accepting the fact that not every citizen in the United States will be able to profit from the educational panacea

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in this intellectual industrial revolution, then we must ask ourselves who will fill this demand for low-skilled and low-wage labor? To fill this need, many communities need to embrace immigration of foreign workers who probably don't look like them or speak their language, and to accept the challenge to train the underclass and undereducated to fill these unskilled jobs. In order to acculturate these new immigrants into their communities and train the underemployed, educational structures need to be established and strategies developed that address the political economy of adult education and ABE and ESL classes.

### **The Political Economy of Immigration**

Every time I eat out at a restaurant, watch a new house or commercial building being erected, drive by a packing plant or factory, or buy groceries, I can't help but notice that the cultural fabric of Kansas is changing, becoming more colorful and diverse. As I listen to people speak different languages, with different accents, it is impossible to determine whether or not they are working here legally. Yet it appears that they are industrious workers and that our economy is in need of their labor and services. For many, there are hard feelings toward anyone who does not speak English, and they argue that people should not be legal citizens until they are fluent in English and speak without accent. This problem is compounded when non-English speakers—especially Spanish speaking Latinos—are automatically assumed to be here illegally, taking jobs from citizens who would be more than willing to fix my roof, bus my table, or work in a packing plant processing my meat. Moreover, these workers appear to be docile and vulnerable, preferring to stay hidden within their communities and performing work their employers ask without any hint of dissatisfaction or complaints. Sparks (1998) attributed this learned behavior to Gramsci's concept of hegemony, or:

predominant authority, [that] helps us analyze the various ways in which the dominant society imposes its concepts of reality on all subordinate groups and the possible ways in which the oppressed can establish their own means to oppose and change it. The ideological consciousness is formed not through informal institutions, but rather through the formal apparatus, the schools. Gramsci argues that the education system appears as a privileges instrument for socialization of a hegemonic culture. (p. 248)

This analysis of oppression explains in part the docile nature of these non-English speaking and unskilled workers (in particular minority groups) who are students in our ABE and ESL classes. As these thoughts cross my mind, I realize my inherent biases and prejudices. Yet, as an adult educator, I see this changing cultural fabric in Kansas as an opportunity to strengthen and expand ABE and ESL programming to improve the lives of not only the students but the entire community.

The history of immigration parallels the growth and maturation of the United States beginning with colonial migration of British and Irish to the present migration of Latin Americans and Asians. In between, the U.S. has been the destination for Chinese between 1850 and 1882, Germans during the late 19th century, and Italians and Southern Europeans starting in 1890 and continuing to World War I. After World War II, Germans again became the dominant immigrant group, and, following the Vietnam war, new waves of immigrants came from Southeast Asia. As of 2002, there were 32.5 million foreign born residents in the United States, an increase of

13.5 million over the 1990 census. This increase is due primarily to new immigrants arriving from Asia and Latin America. (Alfred, 2001/2002). Most of these immigrants came to the United States for economic reasons—rather than political persecution—in search of greater freedom and opportunity. Today this growth in immigration is due in great part to the economic disparity that exists between the United States and developing and third world countries. In fact, the border between the United States and Mexico represents one of the greatest economic disparities between any two countries, creating a natural flow from the poorer to the richer economy until equilibrium is achieved (Bard, 2007).

Since the birth of our country, the United States along with Canada has been the most sought after destination for immigrants, both legal and illegal. This diverse cultural fabric is part of our heritage dating back to our nation's founders when George Washington (1783) declared "the bosom of America is open to receive not only the opulent and respectable stranger, but the oppressed and persecuted of all nation and religions; whom we shall welcome to participation of all our rights and privileges" (quoted in Fitzpatrick, 1938, p. 257). While the complexities of the 21st century are not the same as those of the 18th century, this lofty expectation of franchising all citizens with the same rights and privileges still prevails, at least intellectually. The reality, though, is that most immigrants are not welcome in the United States due to their race, religion, personal wealth, and country of origin. The social contract as embodied in the iconic symbol of the Statue of Liberty has been broken as the United States puts more legal restrictions on immigration (Tienda, 2002).

Immigration rates are at all-time highs in recent history. In the period between the 1970 and 2000, U.S. census, the percentage of foreign-born more than doubled from 4.7% to 10.4% (as cited in Tienda, 2002, p. 589). These percentages do not accurately measure undocumented immigrants nor do they illustrate how higher fertility rates among immigrants groups will create long-term changes in the population fabric. Today, immigration and the changing cultural identify have become front-page news as presidential contenders call for a reduction of legal immigration, fortifying our borders, and deporting all illegal immigrants (O'Brien, 2007). Underlying the politics of immigration is President Bush's breaking ranks with his Republican base to propose immigration reform only to have Congress revert to Plato's Cave (fear of change and the unknown) and become paralyzed by political gridlock (Pear & Hulse, 2007). Yet it is probably not realistic to deport the estimated 12 million undocumented immigrants and shore up our borders with fences and more border patrol officers in an effort to completely stem the flow of people into our country. Nor is it possible to ignore polls that indicate that a strong majority want comprehensive immigration reform that not only addresses citizenship issues related to illegal immigrants but also provides more effective control of our borders. Who would imagine that Senator Kennedy and President Bush would align themselves in this movement toward to comprehensive immigration reform (Jacoby, 2006)? Illegal immigrant population projections in the United States were at 10.5 million people in 2005 with 408,000 new illegal immigrants arriving each year (Hoefler, Rytina & Campbell, 2006, p.1). Though it may only be coincidence, this number compares closely to the projected labor needs of 12 million new jobs over the next decade (U.S. Department of Education, 2003) due to a growing economy and retiring baby boomers. The increase in both legal and illegal immigration is not going to change in the immediate future. It is

being driven by economic and industrial development that is energized by income disparities across national boundaries.

### **The Adult Education Opportunity**

Throughout the 19th century, the formation of the underclass can be traced to state and federal legislation that limited access and opportunity for minorities, immigrants, and some working class people (Tienda, 2002). One example of how legislation formed the underclass is seen in pre-civil war legislation that made educating slaves in some states illegal (Hotchkiss, 1848). An example of how the courts contributed to formation of the underclass was the *Plessy vs. Ferguson* Supreme Court decision in 1896 that created the legal precedence for the separate but equal doctrine which profoundly affected the education of African-Americans (as cited in Cook, 2005). Historically, adult education has not always addressed the educational needs and challenges of diverse populations and new immigrants. It was not until the 20th century that adult education assumed a more remedial position, connecting social consciousness to enfranchising all Americans, regardless of economic status, race or religion. The roots of this movement can be traced to Walter Rauschenbusch (1908) and what he called the Social Gospel. Jane Addams' educational approach in the settlement houses was part of the Social Gospel and served as a practical and political strategy to educate new immigrants so they would be productive while not being exploited (Addams, 1892).

The notion of dialogue between teacher and student where curriculum is connected to the social reality, as popularized by Freire (1970, 1993), has been a part of adult education at least prior to the earliest days of Cooperative Extension when the practice was for county extension agents to live within the community they served, listen, learn, and develop programs from the bottom up (Bruner & Yang, 1949). In today's diverse culture that transcends race and ethnicity to include life style, religion, and political beliefs, issues related to learning across culture are complex and political. Rose (2000) raises these timeless questions:

Are we trying to help others learn more about themselves; are we trying to use contextual signals to help individuals acculturate and assimilate; or are we trying to create something new? Culture can be used in a variety of contexts and for different purposes. The politics of this issue are clear as in late twentieth century references to culture wars that rage over such issues as evolution, abortion, gay rights, affirmative action, etc. As we broaden the notion of culture, do we dilute the essence of learning across cultures? Additionally, what is it we are learning about? (p. 31)

In addition to these questions, we must ask why are the changing demographics in Kansas important to understanding the changing practice of adult education? In Rose's words, are we trying to "acculturate and assimilate; or are we trying to create something new" (p.31)? Developing new curriculums and best teaching practices are not enough. We must seek to deconstruct the political milieu of adult education's relationship to the undereducated, immigration, acculturation, and civil society. Therefore, curriculum needs to be connected with the social reality of our students to promote strong citizenship as well as literacy.

Sheared (1999) offered one strategy to connect curriculum and social reality. She raised the issue of giving voice to disenfranchised groups, in particular African Americans, and brought to light the lack

of research on how to give voice to adult students. She developed the concept of "polyrhythmic realities" as a way to understand and incorporate into the ABE classroom the effects of race, gender, and class. Authentic dialogue is the key methodology used to develop the voice of the student. This dialogue demands that the traditional power relation between student and teacher be forfeited. The teacher must relinquish control, both perceived and real, of the classroom and curriculum. She stated that "giving voice is not divorced from content; rather, giving voice promotes an understanding of content and seeks to underscore its significance in determining whose knowledge gets heard and acknowledged in the discourse. Giving voice means that the teacher moves from the center to the margin" (p. 43). This dialogue creates opportunities for collaborative learning where the student learns from the teacher and the teacher learns from the student. It also creates a safer and more inviting environment for students where they can be themselves and appreciate their unique strengths yet understand the importance of what they do not know and what they need to learn. It brings greater pluralism to the classroom instead of bureaucracy and autocracy. Sheared's educational approach should not be limited to the classroom and the relationship between teacher and student. "Polyrhythmic realities" and dialogical environment need to be expanded beyond the classroom to encompass the entire adult learning center within the context of the community in which it is located. This approach to educating the underclass and undereducated negates the idea of creating uniform models for adult learning institutions that can be located in any community or neighborhood. Instead, the challenge is to create unique centers that reflect and celebrate the cultures and values of students as well as that of the community.

Literacy cannot be so narrowly defined as the ability to read, write, and solve numerical problems. Being literate means more than possessing cognitive skills; it also implies having the ability to live in, interact with, and contribute to your community (Bernardo, 2000; Freire, 1970; Freire, 1993). Teaching students specific cognitive skills that can be measured by national standardized assessment tests stifles any opportunity for adult education to contribute to the socio-economic development in a community. The educational philosophy dictated in the 1998 federal legislation, Title II Part A—Adult Basic Skills and Family Literacy Education, takes a positivistic performance approach under the present federal guidelines where funding is predicated entirely upon individual student performance (as cited in U.S. Department of Education, 2003). This legislation forces teachers to teach to the standardized test, raising the same problems that public schools face with No Child Left Behind legislation, penalizing schools that take in higher numbers of new immigrants or students who are actively seeking work and may not stay in an ABE or ESL class long enough to show measurable improvement. Many students do not stay with their adult learning program unless they are unable to find employment. "Literacy should be seen as a continuous process that requires sustained learning and application. There are no magic lines to cross from illiteracy into literacy" (Archer, 2006, p.22). Literacy is a critical component of local economic and community development, and has the potential to contribute to the overall vitality of a community. In other words, success for adult learning centers should not solely be measured by standardized achievement tests. These centers need also to measure their impact by developing benchmarks which correlate to the needs of their community and local labor force, e.g., how many of their students—regardless of their basic skills

improvement—secure and maintain employment, are in stable living situations, and able to live above the poverty level. National standards do not take into account “variations in a person’s skill and the socio-economic environment” (Bernardo, 2000, p. 461) from community to community. The opportunity arises for adult learning centers to develop their programs within a cultural, socioeconomic framework that considers not only the student’s personal achievement but also their contribution to the entire community.

### Locally and Geographically Unique

Most articles and text on multicultural issues and diversity (see Guy, 1999, as one example) are organized along ethnic and racial boundaries, which is useful when discussing generalities. But having worked and lived in the Midwest for 20 years, I have observed stark differences between states and regions, urban and rural, and by local industries. For example, when working with mushroom workers in Illinois where each farm employed approximately 100 workers, I learned that friends and family members already working at the mushroom farms often recruited new workers from their home towns and villages in Mexico. As a result, the mushroom workers formed very close-knit networks that were wary of anyone who was not from their village in Mexico or was not a close friend of someone who was part of their clique. Addressing the immigration issues or the educational issues in this specific instance required that the educator develop a trusting rapport with the entire community and that the educational program address collective issues rather than individual educational plans. In contrast, large employers such as a meatpacking plant in Kansas will hire immigrants from many countries and from many regions in a country. Each ethnic or racial group is far less insular than the mushroom farm workers and more open to outside resources. Hence communication regarding immigration or educational issues is actually somewhat easier and can be accomplished by working with the employer, local churches, and in many cases the local community college or school district which often have effective outreach programs. In urban areas, ethnic and racial groups often segregate themselves by neighborhoods as well as their workplace. The adult learning centers may have students from different neighborhoods and mix various immigrant groups and indigenous minority populations that otherwise would have little contact with each other. In this scenario, the centers must first establish a safe environment where ethnic, racial, and neighborhood differences are respected.

These examples are meant to illustrate how geographic and local differences shape the educational approach and environment as much as ethnic and racial backgrounds. For adult learning centers, these regional and local differences require that each center develop an outreach approach or marketing plan that reflects the needs of their community as well as curriculum and staff that best fits the unique characteristics of their students and clients. In Kansas, 30 adult basic education centers have started to develop individual strategic plans. Our expectation is that each center’s strategic plan will uniquely reflect the community and students it serves. The goal of these plans is to envision what the center should look like in three to five years. The first step of these strategic plans is to define who are their stakeholders, including students, funders, host institutions (typically school districts and community colleges), agencies that funnel students to their centers, and community leaders who are or might be advocates for them. The question of advocacy is also exam-

ined. How do their centers advocate for their students, and who in the community advocates for their center and mission?

### Conclusion

The cultural fabric in Kansas and the United States is rapidly changing as new immigrants move to our communities and make important contributions to the local economy. The impacts of globalization can be measured in almost every town and community as old traditional jobs are relocated to a developing country or as new immigrants move into these communities to fill new, low-wage jobs. In many communities and neighborhoods, English is not the dominant language. The challenge for adult education is more than teaching reading, writing and numeracy, and it is more than teaching English. The challenge for adult education is to fully integrate each adult learning center within its community where it can be seen as an integral component to the development of local civil society and economies. There are many structural barriers to developing this integration, including issues of immigration, the political economy of low wages and docile workforce, and federal legislation that connects funding to individual achievement. Adult learning centers have the potential to be more than just a place where ABE and ESL classes are offered, and they should be judged on more than the number of students who meet their individual learning goals. The centers should also be judged by the success they have in helping people become more productive members of society and more thoughtful and qualified citizens who are able to fully participate in our society. Granted, these criteria are hard to quantify but are essential to long-term community sustainability in the communities these centers serve.

By taking this approach, adult education will appeal not only to best practices where authentic community-based approaches are indeed more effective at helping immigrants to become more literate in English, but also will shape policy and force policymakers to represent their interests within the context of civil society. Maybe such a grassroots approach to literacy will force a more honest dialogue about cultural, political, and linguistic literacy and will force those who hold the purse strings to put their money where their democratic mouths are.

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# Reflections on *La Esperanza*

Anita Cortez

It is Christmastime. My birthday is three days away, and I will be 56. There is the ugliest cup on campus sitting on my desk. What does it all mean?

I was asked recently to reflect on my “educational journey,” that perhaps I might shed light on a bit of wisdom waiting to be snapped up like some delectable crumb by a hungry reader. The idea intrigued me. *Hungry wolves on the prowl for scraps of knowledge, sniffing out the scent of understanding, hoping for a whole breastbone of wisdom.* We can be voracious in our appetites. This appetite—the hunger to learn.

As far back as I can remember I have been hungry to learn. A friend once described me as having *hambres atrasadas*, which he described as a kind of “hunger nipping at my heels.” It goes back, of course, to my parents: My father’s and my early journeys scavenging the Wyoming badlands for fossils, arrowheads, and agates and the stories that accompanied them. I was a geologist at the age of four, gathering the most mundane rocks and pebbles to carry home to the garage where I would place them just so on the concrete, then deliver a blow of my hammer that would crack them wide open. Inside that dull exterior I might find a hidden world of crystals or expose a surface so new to light it glistened. At five, I was an anthropologist studying tipi rings and Medicine Wheels tucked away in the Wyoming badlands.

Then my mother, a fourth grade teacher, took over. She brought home workbooks, flash cards, and *gold stars*. She confiscated from the elementary throw-aways a small school desk and filled the drawer with paper and pencils and crayons (the crayon sharpener box). I became a teacher. Every doll and stuffed elephant became my disciple. Today when I read articles about teaching apes to communicate, I think, *That’s nothing. My animals were learning the alphabet when I was five!*

Now at 56, I understand more clearly my parents’ push for learning. I have seen firsthand the grove of trees down past the railroad tracks in that nearly forgotten southeast Kansas town. I have followed my father’s gesture as he pointed precisely to the spot where his family’s boxcar sat. I have heard loudly the message accompanying the silence that follows his memories. *What instructional pedagogy advises whacks with a ruler if a child has difficulty with vocabulary or syntax?* I can see in my mind’s eye his mother, my grandmother, isolated by language and culture, in her boxcar kitchen mixing masa and patting out perfectly shaped tortillas. Her only companionship was the pride she felt in her children, especially in Francisco, Pancho,

her eldest, who was excelling in school. I can see my grandmother come late to the school Christmas pageant, slip silently into the back of the room and stand near the door for quick escape, in order to see her Pancho, dressed in his schoolmate’s store-bought bathrobe—his shepherd’s robe—lead the other, paler magi onto the small stage, his clear tenor voice ringing out across Bethlehem as he sang *en inglés*, “We Three Kings”.

My grandmother, Jesús Cortez de Sierra, died at the age of 34. No one knows why for sure. It might have been a perforated stomach ulcer or perhaps, cancer. Being Mexican and poor, she had access to minimal medical care. My father, her pride and joy, was 16. It fell to him, then, to care for his three younger siblings while his father earned a living.

My mother’s mother was a country school teacher herself, so when my mother received her diploma when I was in the sixth grade, it was already implanted in me that I came from a family of teachers. I resisted the idea of a foregone destiny for years. Teaching seemed so ordinary. A woman’s profession, like hairdresser, or nanny.

It took me many years to discover the true value of teaching. I had a few things to learn myself before I would understand Robert Frost’s words in “Two Tramps in Mud Time”: “One ambition is to unite my vocation and my avocation as my two eyes make one in sight” (Frost, 1946, #160). No matter what paths I pursued in life, certain hungers kept nipping at my heels. I might have been keeping the wolves at bay, much as my grandmother had by patting out tortillas, but ultimately, Education was inevitable. Learning was our destiny.

My educational path took many turns before I landed at Kansas State University where I am today. First, I had a year-long stop at community college where I hit my first real bump of racism. I was an oboist. The school had bought a brand new oboe just for me. I was passionate in my pursuit of the oboe. Until one day, that is. That was the day I arrived at practice, my horn together and warmed, the reed readied. I sat at attention on the edge of my chair, ready to make music. That was the day the director tapped his music stand with his baton and said, “Get out your spic music.”

I could hardly believe my ears. This was not music! These tones made no harmony. I knew the word from somewhere, vaguely, but it had never been in my immediate proximity. Equally astonishing to me was that everyone seemed to understand the command! The members of the band began to rifle routinely through their music folders for the Tijuana Brass composition. I was deeply wounded. I thought I was a valued part of the group. I thought I was among friends. The director never noticed. He raised his arms and the band responded. Business as usual.

It was not business as usual for me, however. My arms wouldn’t search through the folder. The reed refused to move to my lips. I sat there, captive to my own sense of what—justice, myself? I had never felt different from my peers until that moment. In that moment, surrounded by the bright sounds of the Tijuana Brass, I came to understand that I was indeed different. I felt as alienated as my grandmother Jesús. I could do nothing but pack up my oboe and escape out the door.

This was 1970, and I didn’t know I could voice a complaint to anyone. So I went on with my classes, and I played my oboe, but from that day forward, I was someone new. My parents had prepared me for what I would one day encounter, not by warning me or dwelling on my difference. They had taught me that I must excel at whatever I valued. They had taught me without telling me not to allow others to label me.

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At the end of that year, I ventured down a different path and found myself with a passel of new identities: military wife, mother, south-sea-island woman, then auto sales clerk, sporting goods manager, student wife, veterinary receptionist. None of these new titles came with how-to books. Education took the form of trial and error adventure. I learned I could tolerate cockroaches when necessary. I discovered I liked squid. I could talk auto parts and fish bait. I could edit term papers and calm frightened dogs to passivity. As much as I liked motherhood and seeing my family prosper, I began to feel a void that my family could not fill.

One summer afternoon after work, a bunch of us drove up into the Wyoming mountains for a cook-out and some relaxation. I was sitting on a rock near a stream letting my mind wander when I saw a large fern, almost three feet tall, move erratically. The breeze was minimal, yet this fern was shaking. Then it stopped. I began to think I had imagined it when the fern began to tremble and then suddenly, it got shorter! I called to the others, and we watched this fern until over time, it all but disappeared into the ground. Finally, one among us reached over and grabbed the fern. It gave no resistance. It came easily from the ground, no roots, no leaves left. Some unknown animal underground had satisfied its hunger.

The cook-out turned its attentions to hamburgers and chips, but I could not forget how quickly this tall, healthy fern had simply disappeared. It haunted me. I began to realize I felt just like the fern, as though I were caught in the undertow of someone else's hungers. I knew I had to make some changes. I had to feed my Self.

I decided I would enroll at Kansas State University for fall classes. I went to see an advisor who told me how to go about the process: "Whatever you do," he said, "don't start out by taking a class from Dr. Norma Bunton." He went on to explain that she would be far too demanding and intimidating in her expectations for me, a non-traditional novice.

I left his office feeling rather overwhelmed. I had been told to go fill out a FAFSA (whatever that was), to see the Registrar about my transcripts (*Registrar?*), to talk with an admissions representative, and when all that was accomplished, get in the lines for class selection but get there early as classes fill fast. I decided college was not for me: *I didn't even understand these basic directions!* I went home and did nothing.

Summer came to a close, and on the first day of classes I suddenly found myself longing to be a part of it all. I wanted just one class to see if I had the capacity to learn. I went back to the advisor who was less than pleased to hear that I had done nothing he had advised me to do. A few phone calls later, however, I was officially a Kansas State student. The advisor immediately enrolled me in Dr. Norma Bunton's Intro to Rhetoric class. *What was rhetoric?* I wondered.

Norma Bunton was the first woman department head at Kansas State University. She had served in World War Two. She was tall, straight-backed, silver-haired, and had a no-nonsense air about her. Dr. Bunton took no guff. She became my professor, my mentor, and ultimately, my best friend. She nurtured and encouraged me. She praised and pushed me. She cajoled and scolded me. She believed in me, and more importantly, she made me believe in myself. She fed my *hambres atrasadas*.

Today I tell my students there are many roads that lead to a destination. It may not be a truism that the shortest distance between two points is the fastest route. Paradoxically, the longer, more twisted road, the one with side paths and brambles and unexpected limbs

blocking the way, may be the better route toward knowledge and wisdom. My young students do not always understand there is no one path to follow.

Today I work in an undergraduate research program for high-achieving, serious-minded students who are, for the most part, first generation college students, some inner city, many from families who have immigrated here in the last ten years. *The wolves are nipping at their heels*. I get to know their stories. There are stories of meat packing plants, of cutting carcasses six days a week, stories of humiliation (the boss who calls everyone *María* or *Juan*). Families are divided, some sent to *el Norte* to live with an uncle and go to school, some left in Mexico too old for the trip.

*What happens to the children?* This is a question for our legislators, I am told, but to me, there is no question. The answer is apparent. The so-called *problem* is transparent. People need to have access to knowledge. Without education, people cannot contribute to their fullest potential. And who, in the deepest well within, does not have Hope? As long as Hope exists, human potential exists. It is when Hope dies that Despair moves in. And Despair can ruin the neighborhood.

Just before the holiday break, a student came to see me. He is a young man of few words. He is a thinker. He is a reader. He is a second-language learner. He makes "A's" though no one would know it from his lips. He is Phi Kappa Phi. He wants to work in a health field, probably become a doctor, in order to help his family and community. He has seen the back-breaking work that leads to health problems. He knows that being poor and minority is bad enough, but being poor, minority, and immigrant can limit one's opportunities even more. Knowing this, he applies the other facts he knows: *Education is the Equalizer*.

He doesn't know this yet from experience. He knows it intuitively. He has read that knowledge is power. He has heard it. He wants to believe it. And so he comes to me. Without knowing my own story, he comes intuitively, seeking that which Dr. Bunton gave to me some years ago. He comes seeking encouragement. He comes seeking hope. He does not know that Dr. Bunton gave me that ugly cup there on my desk: SECRETARY, it proclaims in brash reds and yellow, once filled with Secretary's Day flowers. I kept it at first as a reminder that some day I would not be a secretarial assistant. Now I keep it to remind me how to encourage others, how to be a good mentor. Norma Bunton had stuffed that cup with blossoming Hope.

As I said, my student came to see me before he left for the holidays.

"I have something for you," he said.

He handed me a picture in a frame. There on a stark black background sits a young girl. Her black hair is neatly combed. She wears a simple blouse and sits with her arms resting on a table top, a desk perhaps. Her face is serious, her eyes gaze intently into the darkness. A pencil is in her right hand, poised.

"I made it for your wall," he said simply.

Later, on email I asked him what the drawing should be titled, or what the girl's name was. She has such presence there on the wall of my office that I felt the need to call her by name.

"Ms. Cortez," he wrote back to me, "I think her name should be *Esperanza* but the drawing should be titled *Nuestra Esperanza*. And thank you for *La Esperanza* that you give us all to be successful as students and as a people."

How do I tell him that it is he who has given the gift to me, that in fact, *La Esperanza* existed long before me. She lived in that box-car. She lived with my grandmother as she watched her son sing *en inglés*. She lives in the meat packing plants now, but more and more often these days, she is seen around the university. *La Esperanza* is pacing the halls of academe. Her pencil is writing on the walls.

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# Mirrors Reflecting Latinas' Realities in an Urban Community

**Gabriela Díaz de Sabatés**

What are the realities of Latina adult learners? This question guided the design of this research project. Utilizing a focus group approach, six Latinas in Kansas City, Kansas, had the opportunity to speak freely about themselves and to share their stories with each other. This article focuses on the voices of these women without outside analysis and interpretation to capture the very essence of their experiences as a main avenue for understanding our changing Adult Basic Education population, as well as to validate their powerful and contradicting experiences.

This research seeks to understand the realities of Latinas as they immigrate to the United States and discover that to build a more secure life for themselves and their families they need to learn English to fully function in this new country. The questions asked in the focus group were designed to understand why these Latinas came to the United States, what obstacles they encountered, how and if they overcame them, their desire to learn English, the support received, and their suggestions to improve adult education.

The six Latina women also talked about a variety of issues. Their voices recreated the complex path that each one forged before and after immigrating to the U.S. Very eloquently, they touched upon matters that were important to them, such as immigration, changing societal and gender roles, oppression, personal expectations, their dreams for themselves and their families, and their quest to become fully functional members of this society.

Throughout the interview, they articulated the central role that education plays in their personal expectations and their families' advancement. At the same time, because they were nontraditional students, full-time workers, parents, caregivers, and foreign-born women, they experienced the educational path as a confusing and unstable one that did not conform with their realities. The uniqueness of learning about their experiences opens the door to go against the societal stereotypes usually held against Latinas as crystallized and romanticized images of passive members of a lesser culture, understood as if they were all cut with the same pattern. Instead, their stories offer a window into their own individualities, their strong ways of dealing with adversity, and their creative braiding of the multiple cultural realities that they inhabit on a daily basis.

The six women were enrolled in English classes in an adult learning center that services a primarily urban and Hispanic population.

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During class time, the English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers informed their students of this focus group opportunity. Six interested students volunteered to participate. The participants signed an interview consent form (in Spanish and English) which included their option to withdraw their participation at any time during the interview without any consequences. Also, a confidentiality clause was added to safeguard their identities and personal safety. Students only used self-selected pseudonyms during the interview.

The focus group took place on a Thursday morning at the Adult Basic Education center, and refreshments were served. It was conducted entirely in Spanish because all participants agreed that it was the language they felt most comfortable using. The interview was recorded for clarity purposes with the participants' consent, and it was later transcribed and translated by a bilingual/bicultural specialist. Participants received a small monetary recognition in appreciation for donating their valuable time and expertise.

The participants' ages ranged from 25 to 55 years of age. Four women came from Mexico, one from Honduras, and one from Guatemala. Three have been in the U.S. for at least nine years, and the other three were recent immigrants. Two of the women were legal residents/citizens while the other four were undocumented. None of the six women were fully literate in English, but they were all fully literate in Spanish. Most of them attended high school in their countries of origin while one of them had a college degree from Guatemala. They all had families that depended upon them (nuclear or extended) and from whom they received support. Four participants had children either living with them or staying in their native country. Two of the women performed cleaning jobs to support themselves and their families, and they all dreamt of their children getting a college degree in the U.S. to advance socioeconomically.

Below is the transcribed translation of the Latinas' voices from Spanish to English. Some phrases and expressions in Spanish were especially difficult to translate and lost some of their power in the process. As much as possible, the translation of their voices are true to the meaning and intent of their stories. Peculiarities of some expressions used are due to the imperfect nature of translations.

## **Latinas' Identities**

Corazón: I want to tell you about myself and how I came here. I am from Durango, Mexico, and came to the U.S. because one day my brother invited me to attend a wedding. I liked it in here, and I stayed. I have been in the U.S. for nine years, but when I came here, I did so only with my youngest son and my husband. Later, I went back to get my two other sons that stayed in Mexico. I have a sister-in-law that's American, and she taught me how to live in the U.S. She taught me that I needed to learn to speak English, and two weeks after coming here, I started going to a place called the Franklin Center to learn English. I took my first classes there. I arrived in the States in May, and then we brought my kids in December: they started going to school the very next day. We got here on a Sunday night, and on Monday I took them to school, because I knew a little bit about here.

Melissa: I am Melissa. I came from Honduras four years ago. I have three children, and I am a single mother. I am working and I try to study so I can learn more. My daughter is twelve years old, my son is ten and the youngest is seven: My kids are in Honduras. I am here by myself and I live with my brothers.

Lucy: My name is Lucy. I came here in 1989 from Mexico. I've been here for a very long time. Thank God...I have my kids, they were both born here. My daughter is twelve years old, and my son is nine years old. They study here. They were born here.

Leonela: My name is Leonela, and I also I am looking for a better opportunity, because I wanted my kids to study, and there wasn't a way in Mexico. I have a daughter who's 19 years old, and my son is ten. I came because my husband works at the circus, and we were always traveling. My daughter always wanted to study, but she couldn't because we were always moving from one place to another. I wanted to have a stable life, and since my family lives here, I came here, but I came here without papers with my kids, looking for a stable place for them to settle and study. My daughter studied one for year, and then she started working and didn't want to go back to school. I am looking for a way to get her back. Right now she has a son so she might come back to school when he gets older. My son is going to school, but he doesn't like it very much because he wants to go back to the circus. I am struggling a little bit with him because he doesn't like school or to study. I keep insisting that he needs to study first and then we'll see if he goes back ... He likes to do the trapeze, that's what his Dad does. This is the reason why I've struggled with him so much because he keeps insisting that he wants to work at the circus. In it, kids start working when they are five or six years old, and they do trapeze. What he likes to do is climb on everything. He looks like a spider.

Carmen: My name is Carmen. It's been a year and five months since I've lived in the U.S. It's sometimes difficult, and I get homesick, but I think about my family and I keep going. It's a little bit difficult, but I am here because of them, and you have to keep going. I am married. I have his support and my family's, but I don't visit them often. It's not the same to be with the family you were raised by than with the one that I met when I came here. There are moments when you're fine, but there are moments when you're not well, but you have to keep going. I think that in the future. I will have a family and I'll keep going because of them. It won't be soon, but some day ...

Karla: Well, my name is Karla. I have three kids. I came here with the purpose of my kids to study. Do something better than what I did. My husband was already here. I came with my three kids. I am also illegal, but my purpose is for my kids to study and get ahead and be good people. I don't work. I just study. I have the opportunity that my husband works and gives me the opportunity to tell me, "You study and get ahead." I have all my family here, my brothers, all my family. I don't have any family in Mexico. This is why I'm hopeful that someday we will all be given the opportunity to have a paper or something that will allow us to stay here. More than anything because we are people that have an interest in being here, work, and not harm anyone. We just came here to work, study and get ahead.

## **Education**

Corazón: I went to school in Mexico, but I only finished sixth grade, which we call elementary school over there. After that, I didn't have the opportunity to study because I can't really say ... there isn't ... right now, I am 50 years old, and when I was a little girl, my parents didn't have money, and people didn't study. I don't know why, but right now I am here, and I am very happy to live in the U.S. I don't want to be a burden to anyone, so I work and take English classes and thank you so much for inviting me.

Lucy: I have studied English here and over there I went to elementary school. In the U.S., I have worked and studied English but of course, as always, you find a job and stop studying English, and then you start working and then you return to studying, and that's the way it is. But like always, I'm moving ahead and working hard ... I came here for better opportunities that we didn't have over there and they have them here. These opportunities are jobs, the possibility to learn English, putting all your effort into learning English to continue moving forward, and especially to help our kids because we want to make sure that they get ahead, unlike us. You don't have the opportunity to study over there.

Leonela: In Mexico, I only attended elementary school, and I didn't finish middle school because of too much traveling. But now I am here and working hard, to be an example for my kids. You have to study because it's the only way to move ahead. There isn't any other way. My daughter is here, saying that she will continue to study later, as soon as the baby gets older, and I'll keep going. I keep studying English to help my son. I don't know, with his homework ... He's a little behind for the same reason that I'm struggling with him, he is insisting that he wants to go back to the circus. He tells me that he will work hard, and lately I have seen that he's doing a lot better ... It's the best example that you can give your kids too ... to study.

Karla: I only attended elementary school in Mexico, but I would have loved to study something ... well, that's our hope: That if we learn English more doors will be open to us to get ahead. I would like to study. In my case, I'm a stylist, but here my studies are not accepted. I have to go back and study in order to get my license. I can't to go to school and practice styling because I don't speak English. I have to finish high school here to continue studying and get my license. The GED program is very important. Here, we're being taught English first so we can go to school. We can get to a different level. The GED program is very important. I think it gives you a lot of opportunities, but sometimes you ask yourself: "What for?", but in the end you yourself ... It's not the same thing, to think that it's something good and that it's a better opportunity to work.

## **The Need for Learning English**

Corazón: When I came to the U.S., I saw the need to learn English. The first place that my sister-in-law took me to was the mall. Nine years ago, when I came here there weren't many Hispanics. We went to a store, and she was pushing her granddaughter in the stroller while she said to me: "You go in the elevator with her, and I'll meet you at the top, because I'm scared of elevators". So I took the elevator and I didn't know what button to push. So I was there and the elevator door closed, and I thought: "Now what am I going to do?" I started praying and asking God what to do. I don't know how the elevator door opened. May be someone pushed a button (now I know that someone must have pushed the button to go up or down). The door opened, and I got out of the elevator quickly. Now, whom was I going to ask about using the elevator, or what was I going to ask? I could only stand there and look at the people, because no one spoke Spanish, and I didn't know how to ask someone in English: "Do you speak Spanish, can you help me?" I couldn't speak English. So, I stayed there asking God for my sister-in-law to come back. In my hometown in Mexico, there weren't big stores like this one. I didn't know what to do. It was something very new to me. My sister-in-law came back and was scared, she said "I was waiting for you, but you never came". That was one of the things that made me see that I needed to learn English.

Corazón: I didn't know I was coming to the United States to stay, I thought I was only visiting, but ... I came in May and thought we were going to go back to Mexico in December. So, after staying here for about six months, I started making tamales to sell and a lady told me (a neighbor from Mexico): "Why don't you make tamales?" and I said: "OK, I will sell them". So, I went to the street to sell tamales, but who was I going to sell them to? No one spoke Spanish. So I went back home. My husband knew a little bit of English. He studied it in middle school. He said: "I'll go with you". But the same thing happened, we walked and walked, and who were we going to sell the tamales to? Later, I went to see my brother and I asked him: "How do you say that I sell tamales in English?" He brought a notebook and wrote: "I sell tamales for \$10 a dozen". So, I came with the notebook and knocked on doors and said to people: "I sell tamales for \$10 a dozen." And that is how I started selling them. So, I started looking for a place where I could take English classes ... Now, thank God my English classes are close to where I live. I don't drive yet, but I can walk to school. I started looking for classes and the Franklin Center was two to three blocks from where I live, and I started going. I took classes for a year without missing a day. That's where I met Lucy. Lucy and I know each other from class. That's where I started learning. When I saw people writing I thought: "I will never learn to write", and that's why I saw the need to learn English. I started speaking as if I was playing, and I still do so. I speak to people as if I was telling a joke or playing a game.

Unidentified voice: Yeah ... you speak slower ... Yeah, because if you're too serious about it, it won't work.

Corazón: So, I started speaking to more people and, when my brothers visited shortly after, I started speaking to them. They said: "Do YOU speak English!?" ... and I answered: "Yes" I mean I don't speak ... "Keep doing that as if you're playing". Because their wives live in Chicago, but there's a lot of people that speak Spanish in Chicago. You don't need to speak English. Well, apparently you don't have to, but we're in the U.S. and we need to. So, I ... ummmm ... well, their wives have been here for all their lives, and they don't speak English.

Unidentified voice: My dream is to learn English because I want to work in a nursing home or in a hospital. It doesn't matter if it's cleaning, but that's my dream because I want to work with the elders. My dream is to make their lives easier; talk to them—of course it's going to be with Americans—and that's why I am learning English. I want to talk to them about how life is so beautiful. I tell my four kids and my husband, and they're proud of me. My daughter is always saying: "Mom, keep going, that's great!" I always practice with them. I speak to them a lot. My oldest son is 27 years old, and he's in Mexico. He's a lawyer. He's very happy that I speak English. He's over there, and he comes sometimes. He's a lawyer. We don't have many opportunities in Mexico. He has to come and work here. He's young. He's 27 and a recent graduate, and he came to the U.S. He came here and started working with his dad digging holes and working in landscaping.

### **The Difficulty of not Speaking English**

Leonela: I've struggled a lot. I was working at a hotel, and we would go to work by bus. My mom started teaching me how to get on them. My mom doesn't speak English, but she's very smart. She moves around, I don't know how. She goes everywhere by bus. She memorizes the bus numbers and where they go and where she needs to get off. She would go everywhere. She taught me. I would take

three buses to get home. Close to 29th from Embassy Suites. I would struggle because I was afraid of getting lost or that they would take me somewhere else. I struggled like she said because I didn't know how to ask in English where it was going or where do I get off. This is how someone learns though, getting lost everywhere and that's what happened to me. I would get lost. At work, I have a lot of co-workers from Jamaica and Morocco. They are from many countries. Many want to speak to someone. They talk to me a lot. I'm lucky that wherever I go they want to talk to me a lot, and all I say is "I don't understand, I don't understand," because if they ask me two or three things I answer, but if they want to have a conversation, I leave making an excuse. I can't have a conversation. I can't and that's why ... sometimes I feel bad and say that I have to do it. I always find an excuse to leave quickly. I have an admirer who's African, and he always looks for me all the time. He always wants to talk to me, and I don't understand, he tells me many things, but I don't know what he says. I don't understand him. I don't understand him. When I met him, I would always see him in the elevator or in the hallways. He would tell me things, and all I would say is: "Hi." I would see him, and I didn't know what he was saying. I never knew what he was saying until one day they threw a party for us at the hotel. They gave us passes to bring guests, and I took my sister and some neighbor friends. So, my African friend came over and said that he would tell me so many things, and I never understood anything.

Leonela: What my first teacher taught me was to never say yes. If someone tells me something, never say yes. When they ask me something, I have to repeat it to myself, and I can practice, and I finally know what they are saying.

Melissa: What I do is that if I don't understand something, I ask them to write it down. The most difficult thing is to understand. Sometimes, you're too nervous to listen too. That's what happened to me when I first got here, I didn't know Missouri. Well, I didn't know anything, but they taught me what road to take to get to my job. I had to go by myself the third or fourth day of work, and I got lost. I-70 was closed, and I got lost. And I started crying and crying, and driving and driving, until I stopped at a Quick Trip and an American man came up to me. I had to signal to him if I could borrow his cell phone, and he said it wasn't charged. Finally, he dialed the numbers. He would ask me for the numbers to dial, and I didn't know how to say them in English. So, I told him to give me the phone, and I dialed it myself and I told my brother that I was lost and didn't know where I was. My brother speaks English very well, and he asked me if someone was close by. I said that an American was. My brother said that he wanted to speak to the American. I handed him the phone. Finally, I had to leave my car there, and the American took me home. My brother gave him the address, and the American took me home. I left the car and I didn't even know where I left it. The American told my brother in which Quick Trip my car was. So, I left my car there, and left with a person I didn't even know, and God put him in my way. I got out of work at 9:00 p.m., and it was 10:30 p.m. when I got lost. The American took me home at that time, and when I was close to my house, I was still so nervous I didn't know I was in front of my house. Now I want to learn English.

Leonela: When I had just arrived to the U.S., I didn't speak English. I knew how to drive, but it felt as if I couldn't see.

Lucy: My kids are my interpreters. I'm the one who doesn't speak English.

Unidentified voice: I tell you, it's important to speak English. Coming here and learning it quickly, because honestly if it takes you a while ... oh man! I came to California, little Mexico. California is a small Mexico. You don't need to speak English there. There are a lot of Hispanics in California. You still have to learn English though. Lately, there are a lot of Mexicans here now. Back then there weren't as many. Many years back, there weren't a lot, right? There were only a few Mexicans here. Now, it's filled. Back then life was harder. There weren't interpreters at clinics. I remember one time when my daughter was three months old, and I would go to the clinic, and there wasn't anyone who would interpret for me. It was difficult ... they would always give me the papers in English and I would take those with me, and the people I lived with would translate the papers for me. It was difficult.

Melissa: That also happened to me one time. I had just gotten here, and I went to a clinic, and they asked me for the name of the county I resided in. I couldn't remember the name of the county here, and I couldn't say so—because I didn't speak English—they didn't set up an appointment for me. That's right. They didn't see me. I had to go back home without seeing a doctor ... I didn't speak English. I was mad and went back home. Why can't they help by having an interpreter on the phone or do something to help us? They didn't get me in just because of that. Just because I didn't know the name of the county! I didn't know that the county was Wyandotte. They didn't help. Honestly, you get frustrated.

Everyone: Yeah, you get mad at yourself. You get mad at yourself because the service is there, and they help you. It's just that you don't know how to communicate with them.

Karla: Since I've never even dreamt about coming to the U.S., I was never interested in learning English. When I came here and I went to class the first day, I thought, "Oh no!" A teacher started teaching me with flashcards, and I remember that I used to call the *flamenco* a *Jacinto* because that's how I would play (to memorize the words), just so we could laugh. The teacher would show me a *poncho*, and I would write *compadre* (son/daughter's godfather). And I would say: "No, he's in Mexico". I did it as a game, and when I started writing and learned to write, I thought English was hard. I just realized about it this morning again: you just have to put an effort into it, and slowly you'll get it and understand it better. I started in September here, and I also clean houses. I would clean four days a week, but stopped so I could go to class. Now, I go Fridays and Saturdays which is when I don't take classes. My bosses are American, and I told them that I would not work any more because I had to study, unless they changed my working days. They are very proud of me. There are four houses that I clean, because I go every other Saturday, so I can go to different houses. They are very proud, and they always ask me how my classes are going. And sometimes they remember that I have class, and they tell me not to forget about going to class. I speak English to them and they tell me that I am progressing. When I started, my husband was a little bit jealous that I was going to school because it's not just a simple English class, it's through the Kansas City Kansas Community College. My husband was a little bit jealous, and he would say, since we would start class at 9:00 am, "Aren't you going to come home, so I can eat lunch?" He doesn't work in the winter. I would say: "I can do that, but I have to be in class by 9:00 a.m.". And he said: "Why are you going to school? Don't you see that the neighbors don't go?" and I would say: "But

don't you see that ever since we came, the neighbors haven't changed their curtains? That they haven't progressed?" ... When my husband saw that I was speaking more English, he told me that I was learning, and instead of asking me if I was going to feed him, he jokingly said: "Are you going to ..." and I knew he wanted to see what I would say, but instead he said: "Just kidding! School is more important", and he would put my backpack in the car and drive me to school. He sees that I am learning and that I'm not wasting my time.

### **Pride and Support**

Corazón: I'm proud of myself for learning English. My kids are very proud too, because my son had to do writing, and he wrote that he was proud of me because I have the strength to keep going, and there might be people that want to keep me from doing it, but I have the strength to keep going. They correct me. I keep going and I keep doing it. I'm proud of myself.

Karla: My husband supports me in everything. He bought me a car so I could go to class. I know how to drive, but I didn't have a car. He bought me a little car. It makes noises and everything, but he bought it so I could study. He pays for my courses, and he's always encouraging me to study, and knows that I've always wanted to study. My kids are the same way. They ask me if I have learned and what I have learned. I have their support. Sometimes, finding a place to go to study is a different thing, but I've always had their support to study. My mom and my brothers, they all support me. I have their support.

Unidentified voice: Me too. I have my husband's and kids' support even though they are not here. My husband always tells me to go to school and find out things. He doesn't study or anything, but ...

Karla: I also have all of my family's support. They always push me to keep going. They always tell me that what I'm doing is good for me and my kids ... even my mom and dad. As a matter of fact, my car broke down, it got hit and it didn't work. My dad let me borrow his car, which is the one I am driving right now, so I wouldn't stop going to school and work of course, but you should have seen it. I was struggling because I was missing school and they almost kicked me out, but I told the teacher to please give me a chance and not kick me out because I really wanted to be there. I stopped coming to class because of that reason.

Corazón: Sometimes it's difficult to come to class because of transportation from home to school, especially when you don't have a car and you live far away. The bus doesn't go by my house. I used to go home by bus, but there aren't any buses now.

### **Finding English**

Corazón: I stopped taking classes because I started working, so I didn't go to class. One day, I came to this building and read that they had classes here, and I quickly came to find out when they were, and they called me. So, I saw Lucy at a store and told her, "I found a place where they teach English classes. You should come." So, we came that same day, and we're here learning here again.

Lucy: I came to the Adult Learning Center a couple of times, and they didn't take me the first time ... there were already a lot of people ahead of me. You can only get in the waiting list if there is room.

Unidentified voice: It also took me a year and a half after filling out the application.

Leonela: Three months ... yeah.

Unidentified voice: I only waited two months. When I called in they said: "If there is room next time I will call you". I waited two months, and then I came here in person. I didn't wait for them to call me.

Everyone: Right now there isn't any space ... we don't have a teacher ... there's a lot of people ... There's no room in the morning. The morning classes are better because we work at nighttime. You learn better in the morning. We all work in the evenings.

Karla: Also, it will be good to have classes in the afternoon ... Yes, for the afternoon too. There should be classes in the morning and afternoon, so everyone can come, so those that cannot make it in the morning can come in the afternoon. My sister works in the morning. An ex-student dropped out because of the same reason. He was an excellent student but had to work in the morning.

Corazón: We were in class for two weeks without a teacher because they had to go to a different place. They didn't necessarily leave us without a teacher but they sent a teacher and then another one, which is fine. But one day, they left an announcement that we weren't going to have class, and everyone was there. This was a group of more than 20 people, and now half of them are gone because there isn't a teacher. So, we came one day to the center, and we didn't have class, and we came the next day, and everyone was outside. We all got together and went to KCK Community College, and we went to find out what happened. We all went, all of us. We were walking down a hallway looking for Cecilia Prieto which is in charge of something. She helps Hispanics. We were in the hallway, and a lady asked, "Are you visiting?" We said: "No, we are looking for Cecilia Prieto," and she said, "That's me." We said, "OK," and she said: "*Arriba la causa!*" because she liked it that we all went together to find out what happened. We needed a teacher, and they found a teacher for us. They didn't leave us without a teacher. We had two groups: one advanced and another one intermediate.

Unidentified voice (Lucy?): I went to the school to see if there were any courses or something free (of course) because I don't have the means for that ... I had gone to see if there was a school or a center or something they could give me information over there. In Missouri they gave me Cecilia's phone number which is the person that was teaching here. I called her and she said: "yes", but said that I had to wait because the group was too large already ... it was filled. She said she would call as soon as there was an opportunity. I waited for two months, but this is how I found out because I went looking for information over there (Missouri), looking for a place to learn.

Melissa: El Centro helps the community ... I found out through a friend that works in the library. She told me that they were giving English classes and that I could come. And I went to El Centro, that is on 26th street. They sent me here ... When people ask about English classes I just tell them, "Please write down your name and I'll tell the teacher. Write down your name and phone number."

Lucy: Sometimes you have the opportunity to study, but your kids are too young and when they're on vacation, you have to leave school to be with them because you cannot pay to take them somewhere else. There was a school where they had a daycare, right? There are schools where ... but just a few ... with daycares.

### **Experiencing Oppression**

Karla: My son learned English quickly. He speaks as if he was born here. He learned it in four years. He hasn't gone to school, and he's not 100% fluent in English, but he speaks as if he's been here all of

his life. Everyone asks my kids if they were born here because they have truly worked hard. They've also suffered a lot too when they came here. They would call them "Mexicans". My daughter would cry a lot because she was 14 years old when she came here, and they would discriminate against her a lot. My son, who is 19 years old, would also be discriminated against by the other children. But, it's all good. I am very happy to be learning because they're teaching me here that I always have to say looking at someone in the eyes.

Unidentified voice: If someone asks me or calls me a wetback, I have to say: "Excuse me, where are you from?" I am learning a lot. I'm very proud of myself.

Corazón: My daughter was 14 years old when we came to the U.S., and now she's 22. She finished high school here, and she started going to Donnelly College, but because she's undocumented and because she didn't have the money to go to school, she stopped attending her classes. That's the problem ... And I have a son who turns 19 today! When we brought him to the U.S. he was 11 years old. He finished middle school here. He attended elementary school when we came to the States, finished that and started middle school at Argentine. He finished there and started high school at Harmond. He finished that and started studying at a technical college. He just graduated with a short course because he can't go to the university because we're still undocumented. He finished his degree in mechanical repair. He is working in a mechanic's workshop. I don't know if he's going to be able to go to the university some day, but he wants to do so. I have another son, and he was 5 years old when we came to the U.S. He went to Emmerson School. He finished and started at Argentine Middle School, and now he's in Summer Academic School. He's in 8th grade. All my children have always had good grades. I am studying English because I don't ever want to stop learning.

Melissa: I am studying English. I have a lot more to learn. I hope and trust in God that I will fix my papers someday to be with my family.

### **Latinas' Suggestions to Improve Adult Basic Education**

Throughout the focus group, the participants made suggestions to improve classes, teaching, and create more consistency in the classroom. Here is a synopsis of their comments.

#### *Classes*

- I would like to spend eight hours daily in class.
- If there were more teachers, classes could be from Monday to Friday. I can take classes from Monday through Sunday three and a half hours of class every day.
- If we could only have more hours in class ... I would like to come from 8:00 a.m. or 7:30 a.m., and we could have normal classes like the kids, from 8:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. Even though I work at night, at home I take care of my kids, but I would be there.
- Weekends would be good for those who cannot come during the week. There are a lot of people that rest only in the weekends.

#### *Teaching*

- Be bilingual. The majority of the teachers speak English only, and there are things that one cannot understand and prefers to have it explained in Spanish.
- We need teachers with an American pronunciation. That's what we need. It doesn't matter if she's Hispanic, but she has to know and pronounce English very well, because if they speak with an accent, then we're all going to learn to pronounce it incorrectly.

### *Consistency*

- The other teachers left us because they had better job opportunities, and they were excellent teachers. These teachers had better job opportunities and decided to leave. They left to go to Chile. It's good for them, right? But it wasn't good for us, because the group got out of control. When the teachers left, half of the second group of students left too. Now both groups are combined, so some students are more advanced than us, and they get frustrated because we're not as advanced as they are. So, the instructors need to separate us.

# Latinas in College: *Contra Viento y Marea* (Against Winds and Tides)

Gabriela Díaz de Sabatés

*"Once social change begins, it cannot be reversed.  
You cannot uneducate the person who has learned how to read.  
You cannot humiliate the person who feels pride.  
You cannot oppress people who are not afraid anymore."*  
César Chávez

## Introduction

With the rapid demographic changes that we are experiencing in the United States in general and in the state of Kansas in particular, our educational institutions are challenged with a gigantic task: to educate a very diverse population with multifaceted linguistic and cultural backgrounds, needs, and challenges that is growing exponentially. To illustrate this demographic "earthquake", I will use data from the 1990 and 2000 U.S. census. From 1990 to 2000, the total U.S. population grew 13.2 % while the Hispanic population grew 57.9%. In the state of Kansas during the same period of time, the total population increased 8.5 % while Hispanic population experienced a 101% growth. In its 2006 estimate, the U.S. Census Bureau projected that from 2000 to 2006 Kansas's population will grow by approximately 70,000 inhabitants of which 49,200 will be Hispanic, 10,000 Asians, and 10,000 of other races.

It is essential that we respond in a timely and adequate manner to the multifaceted needs of our growing, diverse population. If we want to provide an excellent learning environment, the change must start at home. We educators must become learners ourselves, diving into and exploring others' realities. Now is the prime time for creativity and openness to detect outdated educational recipes that only constrain people in rigid and dehumanizing categories and replace them for appropriate educational policies and practices. In this study, I focus our attention on the college experiences lived by Latina women in a Midwest state university campus. Latinas' voices are brought to the surface with the aim of opening a window into their lives, strengths, and unique abilities, needs and wants, hopes and dreams, with the ultimate purpose of learning about and from them so we can build a more comprehensive and equitable socio-educational environment in our institutions of higher learning.

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## Latinas' College Experiences

Latinas suffer some degree of academic and social oppression while in college. In my experience, it is the general assumption of many institutions of higher education that Latinas come to college under-prepared, have no clear goals, and are surely bound for academic failure. It is ingrained in the minds and actions of many administrators, professors, and majority students that Latinas always have "problems," that they are students inevitably bound for academic failure. Commonly claimed reasons for Latinas' social and educational "problems" are:

- Coming from a different culture;
- Being females;
- Speaking English as a second language;
- Coming from poor socioeconomic backgrounds;
- Lacking understanding of the U.S. educational system;
- Lacking intelligence and preparation;
- Being lazy;
- Not having the motivation and determination to succeed.

These attributed factors offer an overly simplistic and often stereotypical diagnosis of a complex socioeconomic and educational reality that Latinas inhabit on a daily basis. Clearly, this is not a one-sided problematic. The reality is that Latinas' college attrition is not the result of one isolated factor, but a triad where institutional, academic, and student elements interplay intimately effecting either centrifugal (expelling) or centripetal (bringing in) forces. According to Jalomo (1995), institutional and academic factors that influenced Latino student attrition were:

limited class offerings, few Latino faculty, a curriculum which often ignores multicultural perspectives, antiquated teaching styles, and restricted tutoring assistance...rising tuition and registration fees, inadequate financial aid offerings, improper counseling and advising, few Latino student service personnel...and an over-reliance on student-initiated involvement in academic and social activities occurring on campus. (p. 7)

Student-related factors were: "poverty, unemployment, lower social class origins...inadequate preparation in high school, weak study habits and the lack of clarity in defining academic goals, self-doubt, low self esteem, anxiety and cultural separation" (p.7).

Such a lethal combination of multilayered obstacles acts as a self-fulfilling prophecy. In addition to the socioeconomic and educational barriers Latinas face, they are also often times treated as *lacking* students and beings where very little is expected from them socially and academically. Their culture and language are constantly devalued and considered *inferior*. Consequently, Latinas lower their academic standards because no matter what they do, they will never get an "A"; they will never graduate. In turn, they expect very little of this academic experience, feel isolated and diminished, therefore removing themselves from a hostile environment by dropping out.

In an educational system where the concept of academic success is univocally understood as a high GPA (Grade Point Average), where true leadership only applies to those who exhibit traditional White European male individualistic traits, where being different from the norm is penalized, and where the Latino culture is viewed as inferior, there is no doubt that Latinas are seen as *lacking* something. They are perceived as failures because they do not comply with what is expected from a typical student. They are seen as burdens rather than as individuals who have a traditional and nontraditional wealth

of knowledge ready to be shared, who question the status quo, and challenge institutions to advance in non-traditional directions. González (2001) illustrated very well this complex interplay:

What is problematic is the...pervasive view about Mexicana/ Chicana/Latina students as 'Hispanics dropout problem' [President's Advisory Commission, 1996]. Rather than looking at the ideological and structural realities manifesting inequities, the gaze is filtered through a conventional wisdom about Chicana and Chicano's students' incapability of higher level intellectual thought, the deficit of the Chicano/Mexicano culture, a history of social marginality and economic exploitation, and Chicano/Mexicano parents' lack of regard for education. (p.642)

In the end, layers and more layers of constant and relentless oppression instill in Latinas' minds that no matter how well they do, they are *not worth it*. Further, I fully agree with González (2001) when she asserted:

I situate my research with an affirmation for a contestatory critique of hegemonic laws and practices prescribing social formations, identities, and cultural narratives to one shifting the focus from a pathological view of Chicano/Mexicano/Latino youth to a critical view of discriminatory educational and social practices guised by prevailing notions of educational fairness and neutrality in educational and social research, policy and practice. (pp. 642-643)

Along similar lines, Yarbro-Bejarano (1999) went further and stated:

The need for an analysis of multiple oppressions and multiple privileges in racial/ethnic identity is greater than ever, in order to help channel the energies of cultural nationalism ... [to an] awareness of the ways both our social formations and ourselves as subjects are structured in and through the overlapping experience of race, class, sexuality, culture and gender. (p. 340)

### **Latinas' Voices, this Study, and Myself**

There is an increasing body of literature around Latinas, dealing primarily with issues related to their personal experiences in college, educational successes and limitations, bilingualism, and cultural roles. I present this study as a tool to learn about Latinas' multifaceted realities while they pursue their education at a Midwest state university. There is a scarcity of spaces at our institutions and the surrounding communities for Latinas to openly express their selves, to voice their knowledge and opinions, to learn and to teach us, to thrive and to bloom. Instead, they are frequently captive within the externally imposed *pobrecita* syndrome ("you poor little thing") self-fulfilling prophecy, where it is pressed upon them since the beginning that Latinas are not *college material*.

The purpose of this analysis is to open up a space where Latinas' voices can be heard. This space is constructed as a major avenue to validate their experiences by encouraging them to present themselves the way they want to do so, without suffering the imposition of a biased way of understanding of their realities, needs and goals. These Latinas' voices bring awareness about something so obvious and at the same time so invisible and complex to grasp: people's multilayered and dynamic cultural frameworks.

For many years, I have been involved in the education and lives of Latinas who decided to attend Kansas State University to further

their education. They are my students, advisees, acquaintances, and friends. Some are also my colleagues, professors, and mentors. The experiences lived by Latinas are fully intertwined with my own, a Latina, creating a rich, complex, and powerful reality that we all inhabit every day. Therefore, this study does not intend to attain aseptic objectivity. Rather, I am professionally and personally involved in Latinas' issues; thus I write from my own point of view, that of a middle class Latina woman, born and raised in South America, mother, spouse, daughter, sister, friend, doctoral student, and colleague. I am a Latina who came to the U.S. 16 years ago with very limited proficiency in English, who attended an Ivy League university when her mastering of the English language was still shaky, a mother who raised a daughter bridging two cultures, a woman who is still existing in and within two different cultural worlds, a person who deeply believes in true collaboration and communication.

### **Study Format**

In order to find out about Latinas' college experiences, Jeff Zacharakis and I conducted a two hour-long focus group with six Latina/Hispanic undergraduate senior students at Kansas State University (KSU). These Latinas were individually chosen and invited to participate in this focus group and received a thorough explanation of its objectives and methodology. Five of the students were majors in elementary or secondary education with an emphasis in English as a Second Language (ESL), and one student was changing majors at the time from education to anthropology. Three had entered the United States illegally crossing the Rio Grande River. Three first learned English in adult learning centers and earned their GED (General Educational Development) degree in southwest Kansas. Two had worked in meatpacking plants, and only one was born in the United States—her father and mother immigrated here before she was born, and her father attended English classes at their local adult learning center.

The purpose of the focus group was to learn about the realities of Latinas on campus, their personal educational experiences (including that of their families), their college experiences, their dreams for the future, and their advice to other Latinas on campus. All students in the focus group spoke Spanish as their first language, and all of them were bilingual with different levels of English proficiency. During the focus group they were welcomed to speak in Spanish or English, whichever language they most comfortable, expressing their issues and perspectives. The meeting was conducted on a Thursday night on campus after classes were over, and the women were provided with a culturally sensitive dinner (not pizza, but a generous offering of quality Mexican dishes selected upon their requests). The six women signed an agreement to participate in the focus group, and were aware of their right to withdraw from the group and conversation at any time without being penalized for it.

Prior to our Thursday meeting, we developed questions that would guide our conversation. The students knew each other and felt comfortable enough to share experiences, comments, and opinions, so the conversation flowed easily. There was very little need on the part of the interviewers to elicit answers. The analysis of the audiotapes identified six main themes that were repeatedly mentioned by the Latinas: (1) Their families; (2) their education and that of their parents; (3) their reasons for coming to college; (4) their self-determination; (5) how they felt oppressed; and (6) their college experience.

## Latinas' Voices

### *Theme One: Families*

Voice A: I'm from Mexico, I'm a mother of three children, the two older ones are already grown-up, one is 19 and the other one is 17, the other one is only one year old. I'm returning to school after more than 15 years, I stopped school when I was just starting ninth grade, and from then I came here to this country and I worked for three years and went back to school.

Voice B: My family consists of my parents, and then I have two older brothers, and younger brother, and myself. I was the only girl... so that was fun (laughs). My dad completed all the way to middle school, and my mom got to ... sixth grade I believe. My older brother graduated from high school and went to tech school and got his degree there, and I'm here and my little brother is going to tech school as well. So I'm probably the only one that's going into higher education. Both of my parents studied in Mexico.

Voice C: My family is my parents, and my two sisters, and one brother, and myself. My dad made it to third grade, and that's it, when he was 13 he came here to work on the field. My mom, she only did second grade, and it's even to this day that she still has trouble writing. It's really hard for all of us. My other two sisters got all the way to high school. One of them graduated from high school and got married right away (at 18) so she could not continue her education. The other one got married when she was 16 and had a baby, so all she completed was high school as well. And my little brother, he's 14- so he's finishing middle school right now, so he's going to be in high school next year, and he wants to be a policeman, so we'll see how that goes.

Voice D: My family is going to be big (laughs). I have two brothers and three sisters, and my mom and my dad. My mom never went to school, and my dad ... I think he only went up to second grade, so he knows how to read and write and do some simple math. My dad studied those two years in Mexico and we moved here at different times. The men came first and then we came. The first one to go to school was my sister, the one that's younger than me, so she's a nurse. She didn't study every year here in the United States. She started in Mexico until ninth grade and then she continued here. The other one, she started at a younger age, she was ten when she came to this country. So I'm actually the oldest of them all, I was also the last one going to school. None of my brothers have any degrees, the oldest started in Mexico, but that's it and that was many years ago. So actually only the girls are...or we only have some kind of education. My sister has a Bachelors and my other sister has a nursing degree. I have three kids, and my oldest daughter is here at the university. This is her second semester, my other daughter is in high school, she's in the eleventh grade, and my son is in third grade.

### *Theme Two: Parents' Education and Their Own*

Voice A: I have two younger brothers, my mom and my dad. My dad ... I think he completed up until sixth grade, in Mexico. My mom only made it through ... I think it was fifth grade. She had a really, really bad time, and I think if she had to write a letter, I don't think she could do that, it would take her a lot to do that. Even if it's just writing down a simple phone number she'll take forever, and we have to repeat the numbers, like 50 times. My dad, even though he just completed to sixth grade, I see him as a smart, smart man, sadly he didn't have the opportunity to go to school because he got married at a very young age. It was 15 years when they got married. Then

they moved here, I came here when I was eleven, for like a year, and went back to Mexico, and then came back when I was 18, I believe. I went to high school for a couple of months I think, then got married, forgot about school, worked for...what was it?...for about eight years, and then came back and got my GED, and went to a community college in Garden City, and now I'm here. I am the only one that has reached this far, my youngest brother, he completed his high school and I think he did two semesters of ... business, some type of business. That was it, he got married and he had to work for his family, and he had to quit school. I think that that is pretty much it, I can go a little bit further ... my mom and my dad have big families, like eight to ten kids in each one, and I believe that just two of us out of the whole family are actually attending school. The other one is my cousin, he's in the army and he's trying to be an officer. That's pretty much it, out of a big family only two of us are going to school.

### *Theme Three: Coming to College*

Voice A: The reason that I decided to come to school was because I always liked school. Before that I had the experience of working at a meatpacking plant. It was hard, and even the simplest job that you can see there, is a very hard job. So I just thought of myself, I was like: "do I want to do this the whole time or do I want to get out and at least get my GED. first, and, you know, continue with my education?" That was basically the thing that encouraged me to come to school, because I noticed that I needed to be educated so that I could set a good model for my daughter, and I didn't just want to spend the rest of my life working eight hours a day and pretty much 24/7.

Voice B: I didn't know anything about college. We're from a small town in southwest Kansas. Everybody knows everybody, and there was one girl who made it to college who was Latina-Mexicana, and other than that nobody knew anything else. And it was ... "This is just a girl who wanted to leave and wanted to be crazy" ... it is pretty much what they thought of me. My parents were open about me going to school because obviously they wanted me to get a better education, and the reason I really wanted to go is because my parents would come home and something would hurt just from working so hard, and so my mom would tell me "you don't want to end up like me." But you know they didn't really have a choice there, so it wasn't like my parents did everything that they did just for me to end up in the same position. But my parents wanted me to go to a JUCO (a local junior college), just so I could stay close to home, and drive 30-45 minutes everyday back and forth, just so they could keep me close. But I came to K-State anyway, and that's why I'm here, I didn't really know anybody but it was good. It's been an awesome experience.

### *Theme Four: Self-Determination*

Voice A: That I'm crazy! Now they really like it, because even back home there's probably like three or four girls that are still in college, because like I said, everybody knows everybody, and other than that ... like I'll go home and the girls that I used to baby sit have kids now, it's just crazy to go to church and I'm the only one that doesn't have a kid. And some people might be like "well, you're still not married? How old are you?" And I'll be like "No" and it's not just my parents anymore, it's like the whole town and community that is like "you keep going forward, because look at these girls," and it's not so much them sitting there and saying somebody's better than somebody else or not, it's just that even when I go home, and I see the position that

some of the girls that I grew up with, or that I babysat, and I listen to their stories, and like I think that I'm better off than what I would have been staying there, even if it sucks being away from my family, but at least I'm not in that position.

Voice B: I always knew I was going to come to college, I always knew. Since I was nine, I've always talked about when I was going to go to college. I just knew I was going to. Whatever I could do to get in I would do. When I got out of high school ... well that summer I won a scholarship, and that summer the president of WSU (Wichita State University) called me and told me that I had a scholarship to go to WSU, and my mother said I had to take it. She said "you can't go to K-State, and so if you go to WSU you'll be closer to us." But my dad told me to go to Texas because he knew their schools. I came here ... because in Mexico it's just hard (gets emotional, cries silently) ... it's so hard to talk about, I've been talking about it for years, and it's so hard to see my dad go to work not wearing a tie, instead he has a helmet or boots and it just kills me. So that's why I came here, because I thought, "you know what, they did this for us, so I'm going to go to school." My brother and sister did not have an option, they had to go to school, and they talked to me about ... "well, you know, I'm going to go and I'm going to work for about a year and make some money and then maybe I'll go to school." And I said no. And I literally had to drag them here. They did not want to go to school.

#### *Theme Five: Experiencing Oppression*

Voice A: A lot of girls in my senior class are married now with kids, and I didn't want to see my siblings just stay in that environment and to just kind of follow the example that was being set for them. So I told them that we had to do whatever it takes to get them here, and they hated it when they got here, they hated it, and now they love it! Especially my brother because he's been here for longer, and it's just my sister's second semester, and she's getting used to it. But I told them, "Our parents made such a big sacrifice and now they are working at a meatpacking plant" ... and I just can't wait until they walk out of that place and they don't go back. And their work just gets harder, and it's just really hard to see them like that. It was really hard for me seeing them walking around with their work uniforms on, all dirty, and all bloody. Especially in the summertime, I mean seriously and honestly I avoided them. It was maybe two times out of eight years, maybe, that I actually saw them walking out of there. They worked "A" shift, and I worked "B" shift, so I knew the time that they would get out, and I went to the locker rooms, I went to the office, I went anywhere else, but never where I knew they were going to be. Not because I felt embarrassed, but because it was really hard for me to see them walking out of there and just imagine, the summer here is really, really bad, but imagine being in a small space where it's over 100 degrees, yeah! ... and they walk out of there all sweaty and you can see that their clothes are all sweated through, and it's just really, really hard. My father always asked me why he never saw me at work, and I would always tell him that I was busy. And he would say, "Well, I saw you, I saw you walking out", and I would say: "I didn't see you."

Voice B: When I came here, I worked for many years, and as I said, I worked in many different places. I first came here as an illegal, it was really hard. Working so many hours, I remember I used to work in a restaurant in Topeka from 7 a.m.-12 a.m., so it was more than twelve hours. They paid us the minimum wage at that time, and I

used to make four dollars an hour. That was more than ten years ago, but they didn't pay us overtime or anything, so you couldn't say anything because you're an illegal. You just have to take it. And then after that, I worked in the plants for more than ten years, and it's really, really hard working there. The people treat you really bad. They don't care if you have a life, you just have to work there whether you like it or not, and if not go work somewhere else. So that and seeing my sisters—who went to college and are starting their career—I said to myself, I don't want to stay here all my life working like this. And when I was working at the plant it was really hard, the easiest job that you see is really, really hard. You don't have breaks like if you're sitting in a chair, or anything, you have to stay there working at the speed of the machines. That's the problem, working at the speed of the machines, not your speed. So I thought that if I was having problems in this work, what was going to happen when I was going to be 40? They would kick me out because they wouldn't need me anymore. So I said I need to go back to school, and I know it's going to be really hard because I need to start from the very, very bottom learning English, and I only did school until ninth grade, and I also need to show my mother that she was right, and I'm going to show her that not only my sisters listen to her, but that I do too. And that it is important and even for my children that I keep telling them go to school, how come you didn't go to school? So that way they can't say, well if you say school is so important, how come you didn't go to school? So many reasons!

Voice C: When we were in Mexico we were poor, and I came here and I didn't have a chance. So I had three jobs, and that was really hard. But then I started to go back to school, because my son was embarrassed that his Mom didn't speak any English, and that I spoke Spanish in front of his friends. And helping him with homework and talking with his teachers ... it just was the barrier right there. So that's why I decided to go back to school. So I could learn the language and do something that I wanted to do when I was in Mexico but couldn't. So I took the chance now that I was here and I did it.

Voice D: I got only to seventh grade in Mexico, and then I came here and started eighth grade, and eighth grade was difficult, it was the hardest year in school. Pretty much because I didn't know the language, so at that point I decided not to come to college, and I thought I'll do what I have to do and get done what the law requires me to. And I got to high school and it was a complete difference when I was there, and I never said I wanted to go to college, because for me I didn't want to say something that I would not complete. I was scared that I wasn't going to make it. And my senior year I was done with my classes, I only needed one credit hour. And I got a really good GPA, so I was able to go to cosmetology school, so I went to cosmetology school, I went to high school for one hour, and I worked two jobs. I worked at restaurants, so I would close one and go to the other and open it. My eleventh year my older sister left the house, because of problems, and when I was a senior my little sister got married, so when that happened my parents decided not to let me continue my education. So they told me "you're done with high school, and you have to work most of the time." Well, I didn't want to do that. Before my sister left they were pushing me to go to college and they would say, "go to college to get an education. We don't want you to be like us." And my mom was more of the one that said that, because even though she can read she has troubles writing. So she always told me "I don't want you to struggle like I did—go to college, get an education." And when my second sister left the

house it was completely different, my parents couldn't go anywhere. They needed someone to be there with them all the time. And I told them that I was decided to go to college, and that's when I decided to come here. But they turned their backs to me and they told me: "You're leaving us! You are not our daughter anymore." So it was really hard to start coming here without my parents' support, because of money, even though I worked two jobs, so I could get money to come here. Now ... it's different now ... they are like, "O.K. you're there, you should get it done. But it's like I don't have their support like I used to when I was little."

Voice E: When I was in Mexico I got married at a very young age, I was 15. I always wanted to go to school but sometimes traditions get in the way, like, if you got married you had to stay at your house, plus then the father of my girls didn't let me go back to school. I always wanted to go to school, and especially because my mom always told us that we had to go to school.

#### *Theme Six: College Experiences*

Voice A: I had no idea that the dorms were so small, and I had no idea that there were six of us, girls, in one room. And we used to joke about it, "oh, we're Mexicans so they think that we can pack us in everywhere" and we would just joke about it. And we were all paying for the exact same thing (as everybody else in the dorms) but six of us would have to be in one room. I guess when you don't have an expectation, then you really can't say that it was or wasn't what you expected.

Voice B: I was born here and I grew up here, so my English proficiency is a lot better than my Spanish one, but around here it's just like appearances, like if you look one way ... like even to this day I can't go anywhere without at least one person being like, "*Hola, cómo estás?*" and I'm like, "Why do you automatically assume this, or that?" And I am very defensive about it, and when we go out and people are like, "What's your name?" I just say María, or Juana [not her real name]. And it's just like people expect you to be like this and that, and like all of my roommates are Hispanic and we all go through the same experiences, we can't walk through somewhere without people turning around looking at you because I'm not Caucasian or Black, or whatever. And that like almost never happened when I lived in southwest Kansas. There, Mexican and American kids grow up speaking English and Spanish, whereas here [Manhattan] when I speak English people are like, "Where did you learn to speak English?" And I'm like, "Southwest Kansas", and they are like, "No, but where are you from?" And I'll say: "I was born in southwest Kansas."

Voice C: I was taking a summer Kansas' history class, and there was a bunch of students in my class and we were talking about immigrants coming into Kansas. In southwest Kansas, where I grew up, it was almost all immigrants. So I hear my class talking about them, and not in a good way. I'm just standing there listening, and the teacher is doing nothing about it. We got points for being active in our class, and we had like a chat room type thing where you could post things on the internet and it was just ridiculous. People were just like "English is the first language they shouldn't be doing this, they shouldn't be doing that." I was in a class full of people that were totally ignorant, and the sad thing was that most of them were education students (preparing to be teachers). They would sit there and argue about the dumbest comments and then, when I said something, they would say that I was different, and I would say, "You

don't know me, how am I different?" I would get so upset about it, and I ended up walking out of class because of that. We had a field trip in Topeka where we had to go in a canoe and I didn't even go because I was like, "I'm not going in a canoe with any of you."

Voice D: Having kids and being a single parent is really hard. You have to manage your time with your children, your house, with the school and with a job, because you have to find a way to support your family also.

#### **Observations (just to get started)**

Even though what was transcribed above is a fraction of what was said during this focus group, the Latinas' voices eloquently illuminate the complexities of their educational experiences. They reflected upon the continuous strength that they must have to braid the multiple cultural realities that they face with patience and perseverance while tending to their daily responsibilities. The more I read the transcription of the focus group, the more it amazes me how much these women had to go through and against in order to be where they are and to project themselves, *contra viento y marea* into a future life quite different from what they were told they were destined.

Most of the Latinas' parents didn't attend school beyond sixth grade in their home countries, and yet these parents managed to give a clear message to their daughters about the value of learning: that getting an education was extremely valuable and worthy to be pursued; that education is possibly the only way out of social oppression and poverty. Yet, even though the ideal was a positive one, the Latinas' journeys were paved with surprises, improvisations, lack of support, misunderstandings, and devaluing circumstances emanating from the college environment and their own families and communities.

Due to the lack of schooling, Latinas' parents were unable to guide them through the educational system in the U.S., leaving these women to find help and guidance on their own. Also, because their families were unaware of the rigors of higher education, the familial requirements many times clashed with the academic ones, creating conflicting sociocultural and educational situations for Latinas that they had to confront and resolve to stay in college. One student mentioned that she had to choose between keeping a relationship with their parents and staying in college, and she chose the latter in spite of the negative psychological and economical consequences for herself. "Latino students often break, not continue, their family 'traditions' when they enroll in college ... College going for them means coming to terms with sometimes difficult and painful issues such as changing their identity, being perceived as different, leaving old friends behind, separating from their families, breaking cultural ties, and breaking family codes of loyalty and unity" (Jalomo, 1995, p.8).

One student spoke about her fight against being labeled in college, revolting against academic traditional expectations of a Latina woman. She did not want to be identified as someone who spoke only Spanish, or a woman whose name had to be a Spanish one, or a recent immigrant, or a Latina because of the way she looked. Another student was outraged at the open xenophobic feelings expressed and the sheer ignorance that her classmates expressed in front of her in a history class regarding Latinos and her teacher's inaction about the verbal abuse that she was suffering. This experience alienated her to the point of not only dropping the class but also changing majors altogether, and she was most eloquent when she said, "We had a

field trip to Topeka where we had to go in a canoe and I didn't even go because I was like, I'm not going in a canoe with any of you." If the canoe is taken as a symbol or metaphor for community, this woman was clearly expressing her feelings of isolation, oppression, and her preference to being alone rather than in bad company. She obviously felt alienated, rejected, and devalued, which generated in her a total lack of trust in her fellow community members and an absolute lack of desire to belong to the community.

A crucial element to note in everyone's experience is that every single Latina spoke of a person or group of people whose support was instrumental for the Latina's academic perseverance. These Latinas maximized the utilization of every bit of encouragement to push forward. They also openly acknowledged this supportive network because it is understood as strength rather than weakness in their personalities. This shows the important role that collaboration and true support play in Latinas' advancement, and how they use this help to attain their goals in a collaborative way.

### Conclusions

The voices of these Latinas are multilayered vehicles through which their experiences are validated. Listening intently and effecting positive change further asserts the value of Latinas' lived experiences. Listening to Latinas also provides the opportunity for people around them to reflect upon their own cultures, assumptions, and prejudices; to be more conscious about diversity around us; and to become dynamic social actors that strive toward social justice and educational equity. These voices are not, by any means, the voices of victims. Through their experiences, Latinas ascertain the importance of "doing" in collaboration with and for others, of fighting peacefully with a clear goal, of giving life, of raising children, of governing and working in the fields or packing plants, of studying and empowering others to do the same, of fighting inequalities, extreme poverty, and oppression.

The violence of the institutional interpretation resides in the imposition of an external "understanding" as if it were an objective tool—which we know is always culturally and socioeconomically biased—of a reality that can speak by itself. In this case, Latinas' voices belong to women who are active *pensadoras* (thinkers) (González, 2001, p.641). Latinas, immersed in a world which they are making into their own, are brave enough to open their mouths and minds to express themselves. They have strong self-determination to create a new place of thinking and doing for their own and everybody else's benefit. They are defying the status quo and cultural "assumptions" with tenacity, revolting against oppressing social order and searching for purpose. Their only option is to assert their right to be in school and to bring their distinctive cultural assets to it. In sum, these women are "power-plants", relentless generators of wisdom, imagination, and courage.

Therefore, we must develop new, creative ways in which we will respect, understand, and educate our current learners with equity and purpose to ensure social justice for all. Equally important to this ongoing process, we must as advisors and teachers continually educate the university community about the realities of our students. Educators within this university community are ingrained with *el lugar del saber* (we have "the knowledge"), and the belief that education is, for the most part, a one-way street—teacher to student. In order to have a campus where meaningful educational exchanges continu-

ously flow among its individuals, we need true communication and collaboration among students, faculty, and administration.

If we really open up and make Latinas and other disenfranchised groups participate in their own education, we will have an educational institution that acts upon its commitment to our communities and which serves its purpose with dignity and courage. This, of course, implies moving ourselves from the "place of knowledge" and surely involves risks that we cannot even foresee, but that will surely yield gains for all of us that now we can only dream of.

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# Voice from Lawrence, Kansas: Diverse Adult Learners in a University Community

Angela White and Norma Herrod

## Our Community

Nestled in a neighborhood of modest bungalows, the Lawrence Adult Learning Center (LALC) is a part of the greater Lawrence High School campus. The high school annex building houses LALC, along with Native American Student Services, special education offices and personnel, and Lawrence Public Schools Nursing Services. The location is within walking distance of many apartment complexes in the central part of Lawrence and on the bus route for students living in other parts of the city. The physical facility furnished by the district is ideally located for the LALC's student population. It allows a variety of study settings including large and small group activities and one-on-one instruction. One challenge we face is the public, and even other school district personnel do not know who we are and where we are located.

Lawrence is a city of contrasts. Home of the University of Kansas and arguably the most educated community in Kansas, Lawrence is a liberal and progressive city. As with many university communities, Lawrence has a strong economic foundation with low unemployment that is for the most part recession proof. It is also one of Kansas' cultural centers with a flourishing arts community, museums, and intellectual avant-garde. Yet, there is still an under-recognized class that is hidden from the general public. This group consists of those who have not profited from the well-developed education system and new immigrants who have moved here for jobs and opportunity. This is the group that LALC serves.

The LALC has been moved, and moved, and moved again. From the old Lawrence Memorial Hospital building to the library of Cordley Elementary School, the LALC has been a program on wheels, always moving to another location. After trading in the small chairs, teeny-sized bathrooms, and books and materials on carts, the center was moved to a shopping center on Haskell Avenue in East Lawrence. It managed to survive drive-by shootings and frequent window

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**Norma M. Harrod joined the Lawrence Adult Learning Center as an ESL instructor seven years ago after serving as an adjunct professor at Haskell Indian Nation University. Before she became an adult educator, Harrod taught at all levels in the public schools, and for over 20 years served as the district media coordinator.**

shattering. On the road again, the LALC took up residence at 19th and Delaware. The program continued to expand, and English as a Second Language (ESL) soon was major program in our center. In 2004, the LALC settled into another new home at the Lawrence High School Annex, which is where the program is today. Our success in large part can be attributed to a stable and flexible leadership structure: The center since its inception in the mid-1960s has had only two directors and, the present director has been in her position for 30 years. During her tenure, she has provided strong leadership through many changes, moves, and visions of the center's future.

According to 2000 U.S. Census Bureau data, Lawrence's population was 80,098, of which 5,767 adults 25 years of age and older did not have a high school diploma (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.a).<sup>1</sup> This represents 7.2% of the adult population. U.S. Census Bureau 2000 data showed that 7,929 persons five years and older spoke a language other than English in the home.<sup>2</sup> According to current LALC program data, 60.7% of enrollees are age 25 and older. (See Table.) U.S. Census Bureau 2000 data also indicated 18.9% of the population had an income below the poverty level. Of the adults served at the adult learning center, 10% are on public assistance, and 36% are unemployed and available to the job market. There has been strong growth in Lawrence since the 2000 census, resulting in many changes. According to the latest population estimate (2006), there are approximately 112,123 people living in the metropolitan Lawrence area which encompasses Douglas County (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.b).

## Our Program and Students

The LALC has worked with approximately 163 individuals in the first three quarters of this year. The breakdown by ethnicity, gender, and age group are found in the table. The mission of the LALC is to enable adult students to:

- acquire appropriate skills and knowledge necessary to become informed decision makers and effective communicators who assume responsible roles in society;
- assist students to set attainable goals that meet their personal needs;
- recruit and serve adults who are in need of Adult Basic Education;
- provide English language instruction with an emphasis on life skills and employability for ESL students;
- prepare students to complete the GED.

These goals are accomplished by teaching students a challenging curriculum enriched by a community committed to the conviction that learning is lifelong endeavor.

The LALC is the only program in the county offering Adult Basic Education (ABE), Adult Secondary Education Skills (ASES), GED preparation, and ESL. The LALC is sponsored by the Lawrence Public Schools. Since the passing of state Senate Bill 27 in 1985, the local school board has imposed the mill levy of ½ mill to support adult education. The program is supported by the Adult Education and Family Act Grant from the federal government which in turn is matched by the state of Kansas. Competent staffing is a central focus of the program with an abundance of experience and expertise at all levels of instruction. From elementary and secondary certified teachers to a linguist, a law student, and a psychologist, students receive quality instruction from a devoted staff with a wealth of knowledge and skill and a love for working with adult students.

**Table**  
**Students Served by Lawrence Adult Learning Center by Ethnicity, Gender, and Age**  
**(First three quarters of 2007)**

Ethnicity	Gender	Age (in years)					Total
		16-18	19-24	25-44	45-59	>59	
American Indian/ Alaskan Native	F	3	0	1	0	0	4
	M	2	0	5	0	0	7
Asian	F	0	0	12	11	2	25
	M	0	0	3	6	2	11
Black/African American	F	6	2	2	0	0	10
	M	2	1	9	1	0	13
Hispanic	F	2	5	12	2	0	21
	M	1	3	4	0	0	8
Native Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander	F	0	0	0	0	0	0
	M	0	0	0	0	0	0
White/ Caucasian	F	17	6	13	4	0	40
	M	7	10	5	2	0	24
<b>Total</b>		<b>40</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>163</b>

Data source: Kansas Board of Regents Institutional Research.

ESL classes include multilevel non-native English speaking students, Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System (CASAS) levels 7-12. They provide instruction and guided practice in reading, listening, speaking, and writing. A variety of instructional methods are used including: teacher-led large and small group instruction; individual instruction; group discussions; computer-based instruction; video and audio-based instruction; reading and writing assignments; use of print media such as newspapers; partner and group work; and hands-on activities.

During the school year, many varying educational opportunities are used to meet student needs. Outside sources such as city government, school personnel, and community business leaders are included in classroom activities. There also are regular, planned field trips to different places in the community, such as the hospital, Lawrence Human Relations Department, Bismark Gardens, and Lawrence Fire Department. Field trips have enriched our students' life experiences in many ways, occasionally providing surprises as well. On one occasion, our ESL morning students went on a walking field trip at a nearby strip mall. We were having a scavenger hunt practicing directions. Small groups of students were working together to complete their answer sheets as they walked through the parking lot. We soon noticed that we were being observed by three officers from the Army National Guard recruiting office. One younger officer sheepishly came over to ask us what our business was. We marveled at being considered a security threat! We told them who we were and explained that an afternoon class would be doing the same activity at noon. Even then, we were carefully scrutinized. Although we chuckled about it when we returned to the classroom and students remarked how only a few of them were young enough or strong

enough to have really done anything, it was sobering to see how just by being non-native speakers of English, students were perceived as potential trouble.

#### **Culturally Diverse Voices**

Our ESL classes have students from 16 countries, speaking 14 different languages. They are a culturally diverse group in regards to age (18-65), ethnicity, religion, educational background, and economic status. Students share the goal of improving English language ability in order to live, work, and become a part of U.S. society. As one student put it:

For me, living in the U.S.A., may have many difficulties. The greatest challenge is language. When I first arrived in the USA I noticed that if one doesn't understand English, one is like a blind and deaf person. Also, one is the same as a handicapped person because one doesn't have the ability to completely be independent. Therefore, if you decide to settle in the USA, you have to learn English first. Studying English for me is very hard. However, I don't feel discouraged. I have a lot of opportunity to practice speaking and listening while living in the U.S. if I concentrate and learn continually with a good school. In several years, I will be able to write and speak English better. I can communicate with people, which can help me communicate with other people. It can help me to adapt to the new culture more quickly.

Learning to speak English is an absolute necessity for anyone who plans to live and prosper in Lawrence. There are no other language groups with a large enough population that would have the

capacity to be an independent community. This holds true for the new immigrants as well as those who have been here for a long time. Having so many languages and cultures represented in our classes presents both benefits and challenges. When students speak the same native language, it is very easy to fall into communicating in the first language or wanting someone to interpret everything. Although this is very understandable, it can be counter-productive in learning a new language. With many languages spoken, our center's philosophy is that students need to use English as the common language. This educational approach has facilitated the development of new relationships between cultural groups.

When LALC was closed over spring break, a group of afternoon students from China, Morocco, Spain and Mexico decided to meet for lunch to practice English. Bonds of friendship formed, helping to combat the loneliness and isolation many students feel. One student expressed it this way:

First, I'm come to America, my most important challenge, my two daughters, they have no friends. Sometimes we are crying, my husband not here. I can't tell anybody and we always crying a lot, think about tomorrow. Will it be good? So this is my challenge, just for my children.

Students enjoy learning about their friends' native countries. LALC facilitates these new relationships with "culture days" twice a semester. Students bring food, clothing, pictures, videos, and music from their countries. Each student shares information about what they have brought to the class in English. Everyone has a wonderful time and gains an appreciation for how we are unique and yet the same.

Occasionally there have been challenges. One student said, "My big problem is I can't talk with another person, and always do not understand." This potential for misunderstanding each other led to one incident where a student became offended when she perceived that another student was laughing at her. We used stories from *Our Own Journeys: Readings for Cross-Cultural Communication* (Dresser, 2003) as a springboard to discuss how we often react differently to situations because of our cultural background. The student who laughed did so out of personal embarrassment and didn't realize how others perceived her outburst. The student who took offense was very sensitive and insecure about her language ability, which only heightened the tension. As each of them gained an understanding of where the other was coming from, the misunderstanding was resolved, and the group was able to come together.

Providing for the basic needs of their families is foremost on the minds of many of our students. A student summed it up this way: "When I come here, my challenge is not to speak English; it is to get a job!" One big hope is that more employees will see the need to help and support employees, encouraging them to attend ABE, GED and ESL classes when needed. Alternatives that could be pursued are paid time for classes, time off to attend classes, or on-the-job training. Another student explained: "I hope in future better English will help me get a job in a hospital, or another place!" In Lawrence, beginning in the fall 2007 semester, a partnership between a local business and the ESL program will offer English language classes to employees. Based on students' needing to be employed where there are opportunities for advancement, the goal is to improve their language skills, resulting in future consideration for promotion by their employer.

## LALC's Future

The LALC will continue to attract more ESL students, consistent with the national trend. As more new immigrants move to Lawrence, there will be a growing need to focus on and establish a curriculum designed specifically for second language learners. As our center's budget barely covers rent and instruction, LALC needs to increase its budget to allow staff more time to develop new curriculum and instruction. Our goal is to move more students from ESL to GED classes as their language skills improve. Facilitating this transition is one of the most difficult challenges faced by adult educators. Students making this transition from ESL to GED programs typically need more time to learn vocabulary necessary for "reading to learn" in contrast to rather "learning to read."

The puzzle of how to survive as an adult center in future years is a complex one. If we were to envision what a center would be like ten years from now, there is little doubt that ESL classes will dominate our program. It is LALC's responsibility to make sure all people who live within our boundaries have an opportunity to learn how to survive in American culture. Language is the bridge that makes such a journey a reality. With the challenges all immigrants face when they enter the United States, the everyday challenge is to learn to speak English more fluently. The continuing community support and that of our local school district and school board illustrates in Lawrence that education for adults is a priority.

Change is the name of the game. With the growth of the diploma programs throughout the state and in particular, Lawrence, real financial changes loom in the future of many programs. With a recent trend at LALC in declining enrollments in ABE and GED students, we envision that our future will be dependent upon ESL. As long as school district diploma programs continue to enroll struggling high school students, other adult education programs are not going to see significant growth. Sadly, ABE and GED students are better prepared for life and careers than those graduating from school district diploma programs. ABE and GED require exit exams, illustrating an individual's ability to achieve success in the work place and in the academic world. Yet, as long as the present funding structure does not change, diploma programs will continue to thrive.

No matter what color, age, background, gender, or religion, the challenges our students face are countless and overwhelming! In their own words, they offer a collage of what it is like arriving in America! Imagine the trials even everyday living presents:

- I cannot speak with others unless I have a translator.
- Challenges? When I go to the market, when I need transportation, figuring out the culture, a new language.
- I have a problem finishing my GED. We came from Nepal to USA. The first time got here I had many problems, because I have to pay for the tickets, and do not understand a word.
- I have problems sometimes when go to the bank. They don't understand my problem.
- My largest challenge was the language. My son goes to school alone, and does speak English so good. It makes me embarrassed.
- I didn't know how to pay my bills, too many different types.
- When I want to go to mall, I should like a car, but no car.

Arriving in America! A challenge, a chance and a communicative adventure! The ESL population will continue to grow as the group most in need. In ABE, ESL, and GED, there will be a shift toward more language education. In ESL in particular, there will be a need for more intensive classes in writing, grammar usage, U.S. History, and Social Studies. The futures of millions of people in the United States lies in their ability to better understand and communicate in English. This is an immense challenge for both the educator and the learner!

### **Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup> The latter figure is calculated from data in this reference.

<sup>2</sup> Calculated from U.S. Census Bureau. (n.d.a). State and county quickfacts: Lawrence, Kansas.

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# The Mini United Nations Adult School in Southwest Kansas

Susan Lukwago

Traveling down Kansas Avenue towards downtown Liberal at about 5:30 p.m. on Monday through Thursday, one might wonder what happens in the little building at the corner 10th and Kansas. Travel past the same place on a Sunday afternoon from about 3:30 p.m. on, and the same question may arise: What goes on in there? In both instances, the two parking lots are full, and there are cars on the streets. If it is April through October, the bicycle rack is full too.

What is going on in that building? It is the Colvin Adult Learning Center (CALC) at its busiest. It is an exciting school where adults from different cultures, age groups, and different countries come together to address their educational weaknesses in order to work towards their life goals. During the weekday, the parking lot and Center are full of English as a Second Language (ESL) and General Educational Development (GED) students, and, on the weekend, there are Citizenship Skills students.

CALC enjoys an excellent reputation in the community due to its history of providing quality instruction and assistance in making productive adults who can function in this community. The adults who are there enjoy camaraderie because they come for similar reasons. It is a joy to see individuals CALC help and hold each other accountable.

However, inherent in having a multigenerational, multicultural, international student body is the problem of meeting the needs of those who come through our doors while providing the required standardized curriculum. Furthermore, learners not only have to relate to each other, they have to relate to their teachers too.

Our teachers have different backgrounds with the common desire to help adults meet their educational goals. This common desire goes a long way towards shaping the students' experience at our center as they quickly form attachments to their first instructor. In many instances, when it is time for the students to move up to another class due to the progress they have made, they do not want to leave behind their family composed of fellow students and teacher. It is a problem we have to address as some students choose to stop coming to school rather than change classroom.

These and other similar situations are what we deal with each day. In fact, it would not be a regular day at the center if some challenging circumstance did not come up. This might cause one – especially if one is the director – to long for calm days. However, if one has a passion to work with individuals from different cultures or has a pas-

sion to simply help those who need a second chance to achieve their goals, then adult basic education (ABE) in a diverse community is one of the places where this is possible. One just has to remain open to challenges and to solutions that is not often seen in traditional schools. This article will present who we are, some of the challenges and problems that we face, and how we address them.

## Brief History and Description of the Community

CALC is located in Liberal, Kansas. The center is part of Seward County Community College (SCCC). Seward County is in the far southwest corner of Kansas bordering Oklahoma and Texas. The 2005 county census population estimate was 23,274, of whom 50.4% were persons of Hispanic or Latino origin, a 3.3% increase from 2000 and a 19% increase from 1990. (See Table 1.) The majority of the growth was new immigrants to the county.

The primary industries in our community are agriculture and oil processing. In the agricultural industry, we primarily grow corn, wheat, and soybeans. We also have large cattle and hog farms. The two largest employers of our students are beef processing and pork processing plants. Southwest Kansas, Oklahoma, and the Texas Panhandle areas also have a significant number of oil and gas fields and employ about 10% of our community in that industry.

## History of the Center

The adult learning center opened in 1982 with a focus on Adult Basic Education. The founder, Douglas Radohl, was a visionary who recruited and trained volunteers to tutor students who needed help in earning a Kansas State High School Diploma (KSHSD) or increasing their English Language proficiency. The adult education program quickly grew, and soon there was a waiting list of students needing tutors. The staff presented this problem to the administration of our sponsoring agency, SCCC, and the dream of a separate adult learning center was born.

In 1993, the Colvin family, who are the proprietors of High Plains Pizza Hut, donated the corporate offices they had recently vacated in downtown Liberal to SCCC to be used for adult education, a generous gift that became the Colvin Adult Learning Center. With the move downtown and the passage of time, more students came to this central location, and an increasing number of them were interested in ESL. Directors and staff came and went, and the programs grew from 20 or 30 students per year to 200 to 300 per year. The growth peaked at 896 participants in 2002 shortly after CALC applied for and received funding from the Kansas Board of Regents (KBOR), necessitating a stronger focus on accountability and a willingness on the part of the institution to make a number of important changes. One of these changes was drawing a distinction between different types of students: Those who enroll and attend orientation are called “learners”; and those who complete the 12 hours of orientation and attend classes where they receive instruction are called “participants”.

## Description of the Center Today

As mentioned above, in 2001, CALC contracted with KBOR to provide ABE classes, GED testing for students earning a KSHSD, standards-based programs in Adult Secondary Education (ASE), Citizenship Preparation classes, and ESL. Today CALC offers classes all day long on Mondays through Thursdays, and on Friday mornings. Civics Education is integrated into all the classes. The Citizenship

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***Susan Lukwago is Director of the Colvin Adult Learning Center at Seward County Community College. Born in Uganda, raised in Kenya, as a first generation immigrant she has first-hand experience in coming to a new culture as an adult, and thrives on assisting the process of helping other immigrants and native-born United States citizens know and respect each other.***

**Table 1**  
**Population and Demographics of Seward County, 1980–2005**

**Table 1.1**

Population and Ethnicity	Year			
	1980	1990	2000	2005*
Total Population	17,071	18,743	22,510	23,274
Ethnicity (% of Population)				
White	84.9%	77.4%	65.4%	91.5%
American Indian and Alaskan	0.6%	0.9%	0.8%	0.8%
Asian	0.7%	2.3%	2.9%	2.9%
Hawaiian and Other Pacific	0.0%	0.0%	0.1%	0.2%
Reporting Two or More Races	**	**	3.3%	0.8%
Other race	9.2%	13.9%	23.7%	0.0%
Total Percentage	100	100	100	100

Data sources: U.S. Census Bureau and Institute for Policy & Social Research.

\* Population estimate.

\*\* Not collected this year.

**Table 1.2**

Population, Ethnicity, Origin, Language, and Education	Year			
	1980	1990	2000	2005*
Ethnicity (% of Population)				
White, not Hispanic	89.5%	69.4%	49.6%	42.8%
Hispanic or Latino	9.2%	18.2%	42.1%	50.4%
Total Percentage	98.7%	87.6%	91.7%	93.2%
Origin (% of Population)				
Foreign-born Persons	n.a.	11.4%	27.4%	n.a.
Language				
Language Other than English Spoken at Home (% of Population ages 5+ years)	n.a.	26.8%	41.2%	n.a.
Education				
High School Graduate (% of Population ages 25+)	n.a.	69.8%	63.7%	n.a.

Data sources: U.S. Census Bureau and Institute for Policy & Social Research.

\* Population estimate.

**Table 2**  
**Number and Percentage of Participants by Ethnicity, Fiscal Years (FY) 2002–2007**

Ethnicity	Fiscal Year											
	FY 02		FY 03		FY 04		FY 05		FY 06		FY 07*	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
White, not Hispanic	82	9.2	41	5.5	47	7.3	49	7.4	39	7.1	20	4.5
Black	18	2.0	5	0.7	6	0.9	3	0.5	9	1.6	7	1.6
American Indian and Alaskan	4	0.4	2	0.4	4	0.6	2	0.3	4	0.7	1	0.2
Asian	48	5.4	37	5.0	27	4.2	24	3.6	14	2.6	15	3.4
Hawaiian and Other Pacific	6	0.6	0	0.0	0	0.0	2	0.3	0	0.0	0	0.0
Hispanic or Latino	738	82.4	659	88.6	560	87.0	579	87.9	483	88.0	397	90.2
Total	896		744		644		659		549		440	

\* July 1, 2006 to April, 2007.

Preparation classes are provided on Saturdays and Sundays. There are five full-time staff and nine part-time staff in Liberal.

In 2004, we recognized a need to provide ABE in Hugoton, a small town in Stevens County. Hugoton is only 40 miles away from Liberal. Dr. Self, the Superintendent of Hugoton Unified School District and his staff were extremely supportive of these programs and now host ASE and ESL in Hugoton. The number of learners has steadily grown, as has the diversity. In Hugoton, there are four part-time instructors, including a part-time program coordinator.

Our center's data show that the change in ethnic diversity between 2002-2007 has been dramatic, mirroring the change in the community's diversity. (See Table 2.) Though the information from the 1980s and 1990s is not included in this table, interviews with staff during those years reveal that when the center started in the early 1980s, the majority of our students were White and not Hispanic. They were there for assistance with earning their KSHSD. A smaller number needed ESL services. In the mid-1990s, Seward County, and particularly Liberal, had an influx of refugees, and the proportion of Vietnamese, Laotian, Somali, and Cuban learners increased at the center. However, as the refugees got acculturated to life in the United States, they left Liberal for more favorable locations to live. In 2000, a new manufacturer moved into the area and needed many employees with Kansas State High School Diplomas, and CALC had an unusually large number of adults coming to school for the diploma in Fiscal Year (FY) 2000 and FY 2001.

In recent years, the number of new immigrants coming into our community has increased as the beef and pork processing plants expand. Many of these workers and those who work in the oil field industry are men who have unpredictable schedules, making it difficult for them to come to school daily. However, their wives and girlfriends do attend ESL and other classes, many with perfect attendance records. Those women who have children tend to take classes in the morning and early afternoon while their children are at school, but for those mothers who need classes in the later afternoon and

evening, the center offers free childcare for those ages four through twelve.

The increasing proportion of participants of Hispanic descent, along with the continued influx of Somalis, Vietnamese and Laotians, has challenged us to rethink how we provide instruction at the lowest levels and to revise our curriculum. One of the changes is that the center now offers the KSHSD in Spanish, a program that is not covered by KBOR funds, but is supported by the Seward County Community College.

#### **Program Description Including Curriculum**

Included in our annual contract with the KBOR is the requirement to follow the Comprehensive Adult Education Planner, also known as the Proficiency Attainment Model (PAM). This is a research-based adult education model developed, and recently revised, at the University of Kansas (Mellard & Scanlon, 2004). The CALC implements all seven of the PAM components in our programs, which are as follows:

1. Pre-enrollment, where basic information about our program and all its components is available in print and electronically to all our staff and easily given to anyone who inquires.
2. Orientation, which is a regularly scheduled process where student who are entering the program learn details about what we provide and what is expected of them. We collect demographic information at this time, and appraisal testing is completed. At the end of orientation, we learn more about the learners' goals and place them in the appropriate class.
3. Assessment, which is a process to determine the learner's basic skills in multiple areas.
4. Prescription, which we call "conferencing", is a one-on-one private session with the learner and orientation coordinator to review assessment results and goals, develop a

- learning plan, and update the learner's permanent records;
5. Instruction, our main purpose, where we provide a variety of instructional classes as needed by the learners. Each class has a syllabus and lesson plans that reflect course content linked to the assessment.
  6. Test-taking, during which we follow the testing protocol in the Kansas Adult Education Assessment Policy (Kansas Board of Regents, 2007, July) for the formal CASAS (Comprehensive Adult Standardized Assessment System) assessments and KBOR checklists, and policies outlined in the Examiner's Manual (GED Testing Service, 2005) for the Official GED Practice Test.
  7. Transition, a process that begins in orientation with a discussion of the learners' options once they leave our program. The discussion of options and transition activities (speakers, field trips, etc.) continues throughout the learners' participation in the program (Mellard & Scanlon, 2004).

Also included in our annual contract with the KBOR is the requirement to use the CASAS. This is a system for assessing adult basic reading, math, listening, writing, and speaking skills within a functional context, and for evaluating the effectiveness of Adult Basic Education programs.

Based on the ethnicity of our participants, ESL is the largest program at CALC. Since the center is open year round, potential students are welcome to enroll for the orientations any time the facility is open. Orientations are held each month between July and October, and again in January, February, and April. Unfortunately, the time lag between sign up and orientation is sometimes a detriment to students because they want to receive the services at the time they sign up. By the time of orientation, they may have moved on to another location due to work or family issues. The center attempts to address this problem in November and December by allowing orientation sessions to be held on the condition that ten students are on the waiting list and seven of them can actually attend. At other times of the year, interested students are placed on waiting lists and are notified when the next orientation session is to be offered.

At the Liberal site, we offer ESL classes at 9:00 a.m.-11:00 a.m., 11:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m., and 5:30 p.m.-7:30 p.m. During the 9:00 a.m.-11:00 a.m. timeframe, we offer three different classes to accommodate the participants at the lowest, middle, and highest levels of CASAS scores in ESL. Approximately 60 participants attend classes at this time. From 11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m., we have two different classes for those at the lowest CASAS score-range and a multilevel higher class. About 40 students attend classes at this time. Between 5:30 p.m. and 7:30 p.m., we have four different ESL classes because we have the greatest number of participants at this time. Approximately 100 participants attend classes.

At the Hugoton site, we offer ESL classes at 1:15 p.m.-3:15 p.m. and 5:30 p.m.-7:30 p.m. In the former time frame, one multilevel class is offered, and about 15 women students attend then. At the latter time, two different classes, structured like the 11:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m. class at the Liberal site, are offered. We offer classes at all these times, at both sites, in response to participants' needs like work shifts at farms, meat processing plants, and restaurants. The Hugoton staff is proud of the relationship they have slowly built with German Mennonites, which has resulted in three couples attending evening ESL classes. Sometimes the women will come together even if the men

are not able to attend. What has made this possible is the program coordinator's trustworthiness, commitment to, and respect for the Mennonite community.

Two primary texts are used in the ESL program at CALC: *Exploring English* (Harris & Rowe, 1995) and *Stand Out Standards-Based English* (Jenkins & Sabbagh, 2002). Both of these texts have teacher manuals and student workbooks for the lowest to highest levels of ESL learners. Both texts also provide CASAS correlations for all their materials. Instructors are also encouraged to supplement these texts with other materials that are potentially useful and relevant to students. CALC purchases some of these materials, like picture dictionaries and ESL newspapers. Other materials, like menus from local restaurants, local newspapers in English and Spanish, and phone books, and guest speakers are brought in based on the teacher's initiative and the composition of participants in the class. For example, in the lowest level class at 5:30 p.m., the teacher found explanations of medication and their uses in English, Spanish, Vietnamese, and Somali to meet the language needs of those students.

At the Liberal site, students can enroll for orientation all year round to earn the KSHSD. Orientation is held at the beginning of each month. Pretesting occurs on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, while official testing is done on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Those who need it then have opportunities for instruction just like in the ESL program: 9:00 a.m.-11:00 a.m.; 11:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m.; and 5:30-7:30 p.m. One class is offered at each of those times. The curriculum consists of the texts and workbooks in all the subject areas, supplemented by computer programs. Instructors are encouraged to use other materials that they have found to be useful to participants as they work to earn their diploma. The program in Hugoton is similarly structured although instruction is only offered from 5:30-7:30 p.m.

As mentioned earlier, the center offers testing and instruction as needed to earn the KSHSD in Spanish. This program was started in 2005 in response to the increasing number of students who were well-educated in their South American countries of origin but needed to earn a high school diploma that would be recognized in the United States in order to work in their chosen field. However, several of the students who participate in this program also choose to enroll in the ESL program. Again, increasing English Language proficiency can only improve their chances of success in the United States. This program graduates approximately 20 students a year.

Civics education is included in all of the programs. With the majority of our students either being new immigrants to the country or not having completed school to the twelfth grade, there is a need for civics education. Using the *Master Teacher* newspaper, our two local English newspapers (*Southwest Daily Times* and *The Liberal Light*), our local Spanish newspaper (*Los Tiempos*), scheduled visits from our county elections staff, police officers, and EMS staff, we make sure our participants receive the civics education and life skills they need to function as adults in our community and in this country.

To support the diverse cultures and ethnic groups, part of the civics education includes discussions on respect for differences. Some of our students dress differently than others. Our female Muslim participants dress conservatively with their whole bodies covered. On the other hand, some of our younger participants, no matter what ethnicity, dress in such a manner as to express their perceived uniqueness. What our center does during orientation is to explain the basic dress code, emphasizing the importance of respect and individuality.

Classroom discussions about different cultures, including bringing in pictures and food, are always a hit. In fact, one of the events we held to celebrate CALC's 25th anniversary was to have participants bring in food from their culture. We invited the community to come and sample the culinary highlights. Participants explained their food and their country of origin. This was our highest attended event so far. Respecting participants and letting them talk and listen has gone a long way towards addressing diversity and is very educational.

CALC has offered a program to prepare participants to apply for United States citizenship for 12 years. The program is offered on Saturdays and Sundays so participants who are in either of our other programs or who work during the week are able to attend. The program also implements the PAM model and uses a standardized curriculum: *Citizenship: Ready for the Interview*, which includes a student book and audio CD's (Weintraub, 2002); and *Citizenship Q & A: Practice Questions and Answers on U.S. History and Government*, an audiotape (New Readers Press, 2002). The coordinator/teacher of this program has been in this position for over 14 years and has an excellent success rate (85% or better) for participants achieving citizenship skills and for going on to pass the U.S. Citizenship Interview (99%). There is almost always a waiting list for these classes since they are offered by only one person and offered only four times a year. However, this is the other program in which the outcome is tangible and the "graduating classes" have representatives from all ethnicities in the southwest Kansas region. Table 3 has further information based on center data about the participants in the center's programs over the years.

### Management Issues

Managing an adult learning center in a multicultural community is like running a miniature United Nations. There are many stakeholders from different cultures. Our primary funding, including that for civics education, comes from the Kansas Board Of Regents (KBOR). We are also generously supported by our sponsoring organization, SCCC. They provide both cash support and in-kind support. Hence CALC is accountable to both KBOR and SCCC.

CALC's staff "pays" into the center by what they do not make in salaries. The staff is majority female (66%), but culturally mixed. We have three African Americans, six white Hispanic Americans, and six white non-Hispanic staff members. They are stakeholders (account-

ability in both directions) too. Though usually a good thing, being presented with 15 different opinions about how to best serve the learners can be challenging to navigate.

The learners, especially those who go on to be participants, have opinions about which instructors they like and what would work best for them as participants. The center does quarterly classroom surveys, and participants are highly encouraged to respond in English to both the objective and qualitative questions. However, because we are more interested in hearing at length from them rather than in simply having a few words, participants may also respond in their native languages, and we have the comments translated into English. This process provides valuable feedback for managing the center.

We are fortunate to live and serve in an area that has many different cultures present. We hear different languages, see different attire, taste different foods, and in essence are a small international community. However, we are located in a rural area, and, as such, our resources are limited in certain areas. One of these is the lack of qualified adult basic education instructors who are willing to work part-time with no benefits and within grant budgetary parameters. Our contract with KBOR encourages a minimum Bachelor's degree to teach in our programs. However with the aforementioned constraints, this is difficult to maintain, and so only 85% of our staff have Bachelor's degrees. However, we are willing to make a compromise on this point in order to gain experienced, compassionate, and committed instructors who care about the learners not just as students but as human beings who are at a disadvantage in either not having earned a high school diploma when others in their cohort did; not having proficiency in the English; or lacking citizenship skills.

Another staffing challenge is that, at any given time, we usually have only enough staff to cover all the classes. If a teacher needs to be absent, then either the director or one of the clerks serves as a substitute. This is not ideal, but our center has not yet figured a way to configure the staffing and funding differently to build in more substitutes. Even if that were possible, at this time we do not have enough applicants from whom to select. We are actively recruiting from the public school district's pool of current and retired teachers.

CALC is fortunate to have its own building in a place that is convenient, welcoming, and comfortable for our students. Our facilities are not large enough to accommodate the number of classes needed in the evening, and so we have held some classes on our main campus.

**Table 3**  
**Participants by Program, Fiscal Years (FY) 2002–2007**

Program	Fiscal Year					
	FY 02	FY 03	FY 04	FY 05	FY 06	FY 07
Adult Basic Education	136	82	85	69	59	53
Adult Secondary Education	62	46	51	49	47	32
English as a Second Language	698	616	508	541	443	433
Citizenship	51	42	31	78	74	82

Participants have informed us that they are not as comfortable there as they are at our main building. While this may have something to do with the staff and location of our building, we are also considering holding orientation sessions on the main campus because the learners might be more comfortable having classes there if they are introduced to their respective programs there.

### **Student Issues in the Classroom and Community**

About 80% of our participants hear about CALC from friends or family. The majority of our participants are adults who have life issues that they bring to school with them. Our learners are spouses, parents, or caregivers for other relatives. Many have full or part-time jobs, yet they choose to come to school. Sometimes, school loses out, and attendance is only fair, two to three days of the week, rather than very good, 18 to 20 days out of the 20 possible each month. However, we try not to be just a school but a center for other resources that the participants need. We have information about obtaining medical care and housing. We provide translation and help coordinate carpools. We sometimes serve as employment counselors and provide childcare for the evening classes. Similar resources are also available for learners as well as former participants as we have found that both these groups of people are part of our best public relations.

### **Other Issues**

The image of CALC is mostly positive. Parts of our community are very supportive of the multicultural aspect of what the center does and support our work. However, there are other parts of the community that are strongly against undocumented immigrants and make it abundantly clear through letters to the editor, comments at public meetings, and even through refusal to put up flyers of our class schedule in their businesses' windows.

What we have done to address negativity towards the center is to show the positive effect the CALC has on the city, county, and region. Every few months we write articles for the English and Spanish language newspapers talking about something going on at the center, for example: Participants increasing their English language proficiency; earning their high school diplomas; or achieving U.S. citizenship. These are feature articles with photographs. As part of our 25th year anniversary celebration, we are holding an event each month that has participants and staff interacting with the community, most often at the center. We plan to ask all three of our local newspapers to feature participant mini-autobiographies with photographs this quarter.

### **Conclusions**

At CALC, learners are respectful and responsible. They are there out of choice and want to learn. The learners come from different cultures, ethnically and socioeconomically, which is challenging for our staff as there are as many reasons to be in school as there are participants. Following a standardized curriculum and supplementing it to serve all these participants takes formal teaching skills as well as an understanding of the art of teaching. If we do not pay attention to the artistic part of teaching, we lose learners. Something we have recently learned from the Center for Adult English Language Acquisition (CAELA) that will improve our retention rate is to ask the participants why they come to school and incorporate their reasons into the curriculum.

One of the challenges facing the CALC is the national conversation on immigration reform. While there are some in our community who would like to go back to the way things were when the community was more homogenous, this is no longer possible. Even here in rural southwest Kansas, we have a multicultural community, and the Colvin Adult Learning Center has a key role to play in assisting learners to become productive members of the community. Education is one of the great equalizers. We address diversity by helping this large and diverse group have a common language with which to speak with each other, while celebrating their differences.

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# Garden City: Multicultural Issues in Adult Education

**Hector Martinez and Debra J. Bolton**

Kansas adult education is faced with the growing challenge to prepare its programs for serving the needs of a socioculturally diverse student population. It is imperative that Adult Basic Education (ABE) programs develop effective learning techniques for multicultural student populations. These issues continue to be important topics for educators, administrators, and politicians.

To succeed in the new adult education environment, students from all racial and ethnic groups need to experience and master a variety of challenges in and out of the classroom. In our study, multiculturalism is viewed as the process of increasing awareness of and knowledge about human diversity in ways that are translated into respectful human interactions and effective interconnections (D'Andrea & Daniels, 1995). The purpose of this study is to bring to light multicultural issues at the Garden City Adult Education program. In general terms, some of the most frequent challenges, concerns, and issues for the participants are the language, the financial burdens that they have to confront on a daily basis, and their new social status—different from the one they had in their community of origin.

## **Multicultural Issues and History of a Small Town**

Garden City is located 48 miles west of the 100° meridian—the geographical center of the U. S.—in southwest Kansas, 50 miles west of Dodge City, and 62 miles north of Liberal. The city has a total area of 22.1 square kilometers or 8.5 square miles of land. At the time of the 2000 Census, the population was 28,451, and its racial makeup was 68.8% White, 1.5% African American, 1.1% Native American, and 3.5% Asian. Hispanic/Latinos of any race made up for the 43.9% of the population (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.). The change from 1990 to 2000 census shows that within ten years, the Hispanic population grew from 25.2% to 43.9% (U.S. Census Bureau, 1990).

Cultural diversity is not new to western Kansas. In the early 20th century, the railroad and sugar beets farming brought both Mexican and German immigrants to Garden City and Finney County. The two

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cultures lived together harmoniously, even exchanging food recipes and languages with one another (Blanchard, 1931). The second great wave of immigration to this area came with the beef processing plants in the early 1980s. At the time, various churches in the area sponsored Southeast Asian refugees as well as many immigrants that came from various Latin American countries such as Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras.

Newcomers found quick employment in Finney County's two beef processing plants and other agriculturally-based industries. In the past ten years, Old Colony Mennonites (also called, German Mennonites) began moving away from Mexico and into the U.S. as land and job opportunities in agriculture became scarce in their home country. Also the civil wars in Somalia purged many of its citizens, and some came to western Kansas, once again, providing job opportunities in the beef processing plants. In *Any Way You Cut It: Meat Processing and Small Town America*, Stull (1991) stated that rural communities that attract or have meat processing plants can also expect to be confronted with school overcrowding, homelessness, housing shortages, and elevated unemployment. The many Latino and Southeast Asian laborers upon whom these industries depend often pose unprecedented linguistic and cultural challenges for schools and communities.

Now in the 21st century, Finney County is anticipating the arrival of three coal-fired power plants through an agreement with Sunflower Electric Cooperative of Kansas and Tri-State Generation and Transmission Association of Colorado. Educational, health, social, and city/county services have begun to "brace" themselves for a new influx of workers and their families.

## **Garden City: The History of the Adult Learning Center (ALC)**

The Garden City's ALC began in the mid 1980s as a tutoring center concentrating on adult education. In 1986, Garden City Community College (GCCC) stepped in with a state-funded grant, and the ALC was born.

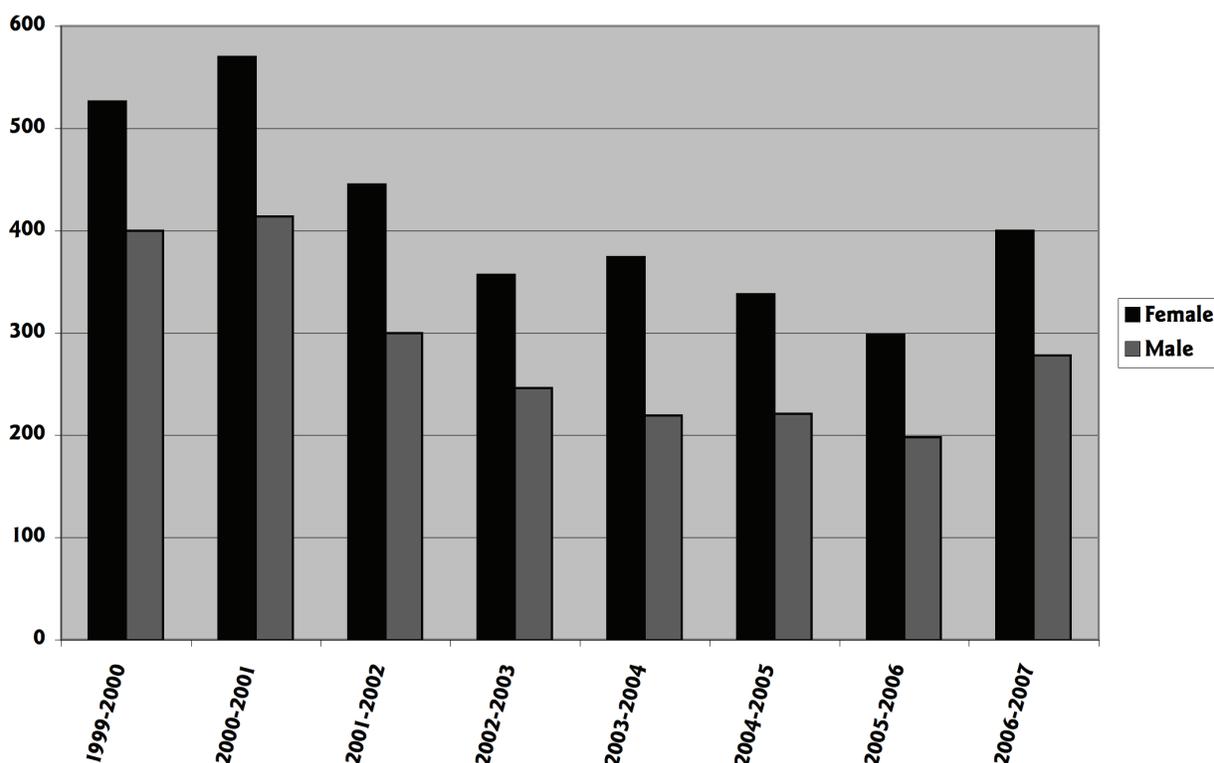
The adult education programs were located in a large utility van, purchased and sponsored by the United Methodist Church, called Learn and Earn. The ALC housed 27 students who studied English as a second language (ESL) or the General Educational Development (GED). The classes were taught by a staff of seven volunteers and one paid staff person. During the same year, the U.S. began to grant amnesty to foreign-born citizens and gave them opportunities for expedited work and residency legalization processes. That marked the beginning of the ALC's citizenship classes. Student enrollment grew significantly with the added refugee and literacy programs. This meant for ALC to make yet another move to accommodate more students and a growing teaching staff. Students spoke a variety of languages including Spanish, French, Vietnamese, Laotian, Hmong, Cambodian, German, and Chinese in addition to several different dialects. The GED test was offered in English, Spanish, and French. The cost of the GED test was \$4.00 per subject, and there was no charge for the tutoring. Students could attend on an open-entry/open-exit basis. Today the cost for the GED test is \$68.00.

By 1995, Even Start Family Literacy was added, so children (birth to three years of age) could accompany their parents on the premises and in other sites in the community. Such change brought 110 children in age-appropriate learning programs while their parents learned English, studied citizenship, or prepared to take the GED. In 1996, the Family

**Table 1**  
**Percentage of Adult Education Participants by Gender, 1999–2000 through 2006–2007**

Gender	Year							
	1999–2000	2000–2001	2001–2002	2002–2003	2003–2004	2004–2005	2005–2006	2006–2007
Female (%)	57	58	60	59	63	60	60	59
Male (%)	43	42	40	41	37	40	40	41

**Figure 1**  
**Number of Adult Education Participants by Gender, 1999–2000 through 2006–2007**



Resource Center was welcomed into the ALC. It focused on health and social services for the students and their families along with other residents in the community. In 1999, the ALC embarked on a partnership with the local school district to combine the Garden City Alternative High School with the GCCC’s adult education programs. That was the beginning of the Finney County Community Learning Center. Under one roof owned by the school district, the adult education programs, which included ESL, general education development (GED preparation in Spanish and English), Even Start Family Literacy, One Stop Workforce Development Center, Operation Advance (Migrant High School Completion Diploma), Newcomers (for newly arrived, non-English speaking student orientation), and the Family Resource Center (now staffed by an advanced registered nurse practitioner, a Master’s degreed social worker, family advocate, and a family life educator), joined with the alternative high school to become a “one stop educational shop” for the community. The

center served 1600 students’ of all ages. That partnership dissolved in 2006.

The adult education programs recently had a brand-new home built for it on the GCCC campus. Since its beginning, the ALC has changed locations from a utility van to an old gas station, to two store fronts, to an old furniture store, and finally to a building built specifically for its use. Currently, the ALC serves 700 students with 21 part-time and three full-time staff. It offers services on ESL, GED in Spanish and English, citizenship preparation, and computer instruction. By partnering with diverse community agencies and services, the ALC provides students with information about health, finances, community activities and family recreation.

Adult education opportunities in Garden City began with the sponsored program from the United Methodist Church. After a year, the program received grant funding from the Kansas Department of Education, the Kansas Board of Regents, and considerable support from

GCCC. Grant funds have included adult basic education funding from refugee resettlement funds, work readiness skills, ELCE (civics), and family literacy funding. After receiving funds, the ALC began to hire qualified instructors to provide improved services. Most instructors were required to have some teaching experience at elementary, secondary, or adult education levels.

As of today, the majority of the staff holds a Bachelor's degree in education or related field. The ALC requires the staff to participate in ongoing trainings to develop and complete an individual development plan which aligns with the center's program improvement plan. One of the goals for the program is to keep 100% of the instructors involved in continuous training by attending national conferences, state workshops, and monthly local trainings. The ALC has maintained an 85% average of instructors with a Bachelor's degree for the past ten years.

### Participants' Demographics

The ongoing changes in the adult education evaluation system transform how the instructors and staff will perform their activities in relation to students. The ALC strives to provide innovative opportunities that promote and assist participants in successfully meeting their educational and life goals in an environment that is committed to life-long learning.

The adult education programs were designed to provide services to adults 16 years old and over. In 1985, the ALC participants consisted of approximately 85% adult students (25+ years of age) who were enrolled in ESL classes and 15% younger students (between 16 and 25 years old) who were preparing for the GED diploma and attending the English classes as well.

The majority of the students participating in adult education around the end of the 1980s were over the age of 19 while the percentage of younger adults (16-18 years old) was minimal. In 1999, the percentage of students using adult education services were: 6% between

ages 19 and 24; 73% between ages 25 and 44; 16% between ages 45 and 59; and 5% were 60 years and older.

In 2001, when GCCC joined services with the local school district and the ALC, the latter's serviced population changed once more: 10% of the participants were between the ages of 16-18; 20% between 19-24; 55% between 25-44; 10% between 45-59; and 5% were 60 years old or older. In terms of gender, in the last seven years the ALC's student population was mostly female as Table 1 and Figure 1 illustrate. During the same period of time, the ALC's ethnicity's composition was overwhelmingly Hispanic as Table 2 and Figure 2 illustrate.

### Program Performance

The adult education programs have modernized the way in which they provide services and are now accountable for participants' success. One of ALC's biggest changes over the past ten years has been the increased emphasis on accountability and program quality. Ten years ago, the focus of the adult education program relied solely on student recruitment and attendance. The goal was to get a student to participate in it for 12 or more hours. Now, to be successful as a program, the students also need to demonstrate proof of academic success as measured by improved scores on standardized assessments. A significant portion of funding is determined by the percentage of student achievements. Programs are also evaluated using a rigorous set of quality indicators ranging from levels of student success, amount of local financial support, and specific program procedures to level teacher education and staff development. The program's score on quality indicators also determines a significant portion of funding. These indicators are adjusted on a yearly basis.

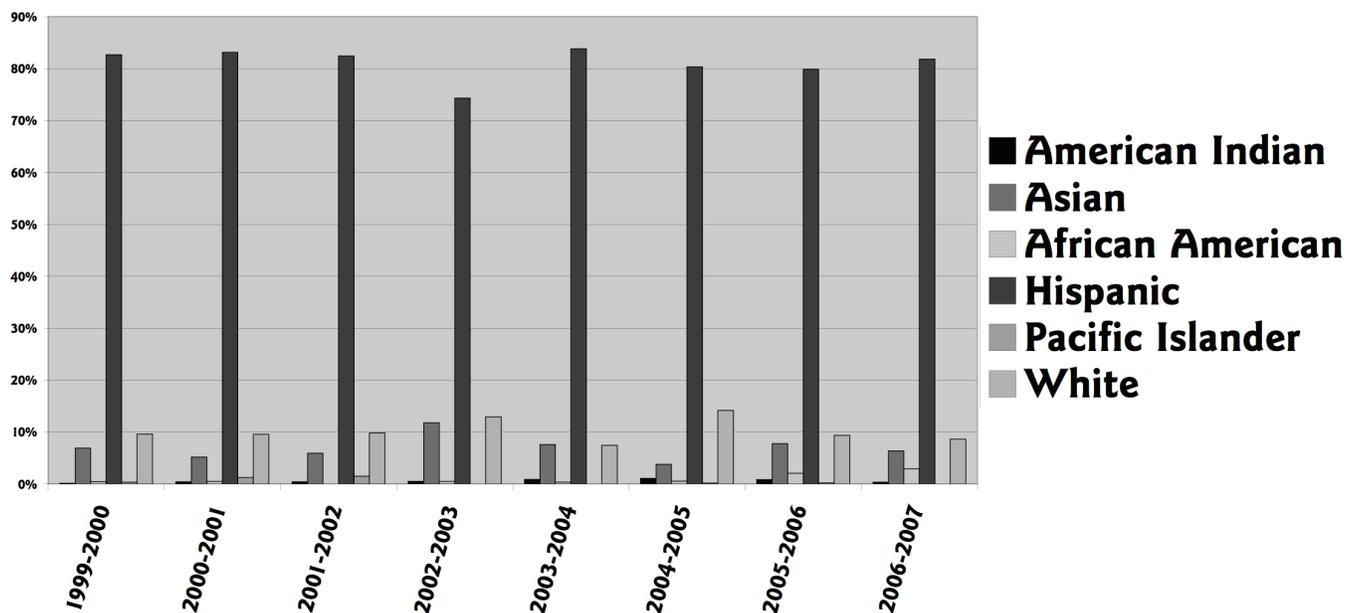
### Student Questionnaires

Because we wanted to learn more about and validate our students' learning experiences, we designed a questionnaire with the purpose

**Table 2**  
**Number of Adult Education Participants by Ethnicity, 1999–2000 through 2006–2007**

Ethnicity	Year							
	1999–2000	2000–2001	2001–2002	2002–2003	2003–2004	2004–2005	2005–2006	2006–2007
American Indian	1	4	3	3	5	6	4	2
Asian	64	51	44	71	45	21	38	37
African American	4	5	0	3	2	3	10	17
Hispanic	768	818	614	448	497	449	392	476
Pacific Islander	3	12	11	0	0	1	1	0
White	89	94	73	78	44	79	46	50

**Figure 2**  
**Percentage of Adult Education Participants by Ethnicity**



of identifying the educational challenges they face at home, at work, in the community, and in school. We also wanted to see if those challenges changed through time. Our questions were:

1. As a student, what challenges did you experience at home?
2. What challenges did you encounter at work?
3. What challenges did you find at school?
4. What challenges did you encounter within the community?

These questions were available in English, Spanish and Vietnamese, and given to all current program participants involved in ongoing learning sessions. Instructors were asked to administer the questionnaire and have students complete it during class. A different questionnaire was delivered to the administrative staff, instructional staff, and previous students. All answers were confidential and anonymous. We had a 56% response rate.

Regarding the challenges at home, most students said that it was difficult for them to find time to “be with my family”. Over 55% of the responses indicated that it was a problem for students to have less time at home. Most parents participating in the ALC need to work on a complex schedule to financially provide for their families, many times juggling multiple jobs. Some students’ work schedules change on a weekly basis (or even daily basis) making it difficult for them to attend classes regularly. Additional comments were related to the difficulty of adult learners in knowing where to find information about the center and how to obtain or finish their education.

Other responses indicated the urgent need for parents to learn English in order to help their children with their school homework, their need to communicate with school officials regarding school activities and involvement, and how they can integrate into Garden City by improving their relations with others in the community. It is important to note that, even though the school district offers general school information in different languages for non-English speaking parents, this does not apply to the children’s academic and homework assessments. The direct result is that it is difficult for the

parents to understand school assignments, class structure, and school organization—all of which are necessary if parents want to help their children succeed in school.

The main answer to question two regarding challenges at work was “language”; and not surprisingly, the majority of survey responses came from ESL students. Their need to learn and understand English is a priority in order to advance professionally in their work place and to have an opportunity to move onto a better job. It is important to note that GED students’ answers to this question revolved around improving “job-related skills”. Some comments specifically highlighted the abuse that the employees suffer from employers when workers are not proficient in English (lower wages, worst jobs assigned, no promotion, shorter or no break times).

Responses to question three related to the difficulty of “communicating with teachers”. Participants come to our center to obtain basic skills that will help them understand their children’s educational system. They commented about their frustration when attending musicals, meetings, and other types of school activities. They said, “These activities are for people that speak English or are educated people.” In the local school district, parents are required to attend school meetings. Yet, they often do not understand what is being said. Once again, the language barrier is the main obstacle for our students.

The last question asked what kind of challenges do you experience in the community. The most common answer was: “being able to understand others”. This answer describes the frustration of ESL students trying to survive in a new world and how essential it is for them to be able to communicate their ideas and feelings. Some comments related to this question revolved around the importance of speaking English when visiting the doctor’s office, health clinic, and police department or attending community activities.

The vast cultural, socioeconomical, educational, and linguistic diversity among our students presents a true challenge when we

want to provide every student with the right services. Some of our participants never received an education in their country of origin while others come with a high school diploma or higher degree. This second type of students advances quickly in their personal and educational goals; and some of them have even achieved the highest score in the state's Spanish GED. We also have students who dropped out of school 10 to 20 years ago and decided to come back as adult learners. These students have many life experiences, work, and family responsibilities with little time to waste. They often obtain the English GED in a few weeks.

There are many factors that impact adults' decision to further their education. Students want to attend classes and still keep their jobs. New immigrants face the challenge of integrating into a new society and a new culture. They must often adapt to a new learning environment in our classes that is quite different from the schools they attended in their home country. Most realize that what is being taught in our classes will improve the quality of life for themselves as well as their families. It is also important to mention the significant role change that females experience at home once they return to school while trying to adapt to a new society.

### **The Future of the Adult Learning Center**

In August 2006, when ALC moved to its new building on the campus of GCCC, our students will enter a new world: "The Community College." Some students were under the impression that college was only for White Americans and not for immigrants of other races and ethnic backgrounds. Before ALC moved to campus, the college administration initiated a public awareness campaign throughout our service area informing everyone of the move and how to get to our building. The results of this effort were that in the first two quarters at our new location the number of students doubled when compared the previous fiscal year.

Today, the ALC is providing opportunities for new participants throughout the entire community. We offer programs in the county jail and various workplaces, and even provide students with an access code so they can study at home via the Internet using the same books and curriculum as our classrooms. We continue to look for new ways we can better serve our students while strengthening our partnership with our host institution, GCCC.

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# OutFront Adult Education Center: The Impact of Closing the Adult Learning Center in Leavenworth, Kansas

Jewell Shepard

## Our Future: What our Learners Need and Want

Every adult learning center is continually changing, reflecting demographic changes in their community and state and federal mandates. OutFront is not just changing; it is closing. Effective June 30, 2007, The University of Saint Mary, our host institution, ceased its sponsorship of OutFront. OutFront was funded primarily through the AEFLA (Adult Education Family Literacy Act) grant and the City of Leavenworth block grant. The Leavenworth Sisters of Charity provided cash assistance as did the local Wal-Mart, Hallmark Corporation, Leavenworth County Human Service Council, and Fort Leavenworth Thrift Shop. However, since it was widely held in the community that the Sisters have enormous amounts of money, it was difficult for OutFront to fund raise on its own behalf. This problem was accentuated by a sharp decline in the number of participants in Fiscal Years 2006 and 2007, which led to a sharp decline in federal funding. The university was unable to compensate for the lack of federal funds.

The University of Saint Mary has hosted our program since its inception in 1985. This private Catholic university provided book-keeping, audit and payroll services, as well as assistance with copying large projects, marketing, and legal matters (such as the lease on the building). Because the university was struggling financially, it was unable to provide added cash supplements to the federal grant and local donations as other community colleges and unified school districts do with their adult learning centers.

News of the closing adversely affected the learners, staff, and community. In fact, there was an equal sense of despair among learners and teachers when OutFront announced it was closing. Since then, assurances have been made that there will be another host institution to sponsor a similar program, thus lessening the emotional impact. As of September 15, 2007, no one has been rehired for the new program. Yet, the former staff gets together on the phone or in person to share their distress about personal finances and concerns about the future of the learners that need help.

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Regardless of the institution that will host an adult education program in Leavenworth County, the learners have indicated that what is most important about their center is the instructors. Our adult learners indicate that changing the host institution or location will not affect them. The English as Second Language (ESL) learners were surveyed separately and asked the same questions as the Adult Basic Education (ABE) learners. If they were unable to write well enough in English to answer the questions, they responded verbally, and the instructor wrote down their responses. The ESL learners responded positively to the questions concerning instructors and hours. However, the ESL learners have strong feelings about the closure because they have been told there will not be a program to learn English after OutFront closes. One ESL learner wrote, "It makes me sad. I am disappointed. It will affect my learning English. It keeps me from getting a better job."

## Leavenworth

Established when Kansas was still a territory, Leavenworth was the first city in Kansas, built next to Fort Leavenworth as a support community for soldiers and their families. Many old brick stables, homes, and businesses still stand. It occupies a hilly area of the state and defies the stereotype of Kansas being flat and uninteresting. Leavenworth is a fairly small community with an estimated 35,211 inhabitants in 2003. More than a quarter (27.7%) of its citizens are under 18 years of age. The town is located alongside the Missouri River in the northeast section of the state. The land area covers 24 square miles, with an average of 1,507 people per square mile (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.).

The racial composition of Leavenworth is 76.8% White, which is a slight decline since the U.S. 1990 Census when Leavenworth's population was 80.0% White. The percentage of African Americans has increased from 15.8% of the total population in 1990 to 16.3% in 2000. The number of Hispanics/Latinos has also increased during the same period from 4.7% to 5.1%. The remaining population includes American Indians, Asians, Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islanders (U.S. Census Bureau, 1990). However, Leavenworth is more racially and culturally diverse than these statistics indicate. This is because Leavenworth is right across the street from Fort Leavenworth, which is home to the Command and General Staff College. Fort Leavenworth trains military officers from all over the world and houses their families. These families play an important role in the town's awareness of different countries, cultures, appearances, and food specialties. Such diversity provides multiple opportunities for its inhabitants to be aware and accepting of the many gender, racial, ethnic and cultural differences.

## OutFront: History and Operation

OutFront—Leavenworth's only adult learning center—was founded by Kitty Bronec, who was (and still is) very involved with the local Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth. Initially classes were held downtown above a pharmacy and soda fountain store. Students were allowed to smoke inside, come and go at will, and study whatever they chose. The outcome measure then was to pass the General Educational Development (GED) tests, and there were few requirements to receive funding. Since then, the requirements for federal grants and state pressure to obtain measurable outcomes have become increasingly demanding, especially since the year 2000. Instructors often complain that the pressure to obtain "educational gains" (as

measured by the CASAS - Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System- tests) interferes with their productive teaching. They felt this pressure shifts the focus from meeting the demands of the learner to meeting the demands of government.

OutFront outgrew its original location in 1994 and moved to another location downtown that was more comfortable and had space for 20 to 30 students. It also had a large computer room and separate tutoring rooms. Although it was housed in a basement, the fronts of the office and the computer lab had windows that allowed natural light in so the area felt quite open and pleasant. It was located near the poorest part of town with the highest crime but was in walking distance for many students who lived in the neighborhood close to the downtown.

OutFront's student population reflected the racial and cultural diversity of Leavenworth and offered an opportunity for students to interact and collaborate. Social interactions occurred in the classroom between students from all over the world who were learning English and basic skills. Instructors held joint celebrations with ABE and ESL students where they learned about American culture and holidays and shared stories about their own cultures.

Interestingly, ESL learners from Fort Leavenworth were almost always from the upper socioeconomic class in their countries of origin and typically well-educated. These learners interacted with our ABE learners who almost always were from low income families with limited education. Often ABE students were younger than ESL students and looked "rough and tough", some with extreme facial piercing and tattoos. The results of this rich interaction were that all learners became more accepting of diversity and overcame negative stereotypes towards people who have different cultural values. For example, a 30 year-old Korean woman befriended a 17 year-old White male with severe family problems. She encouraged him to continue to attend classes and spoke with him often about the poverty in her country. He passed the GED test, and his attitude shifted from defiant to gentle. She in turn learned not to judge a teenager by his or her appearance.

All of our instructors had at least a Bachelor's degree as required by the Kansas Board of Regents. A third of the instructors over the past years also had Master's degrees and teaching certificates. All instructors were required to be members of the Kansas Adult Education Association and maintain their credentials by earning a certain number of continuing education points every two years. These points were earned through the Kansas Board of Regents training sessions, the Kansas Adult Education Association annual conference, self-study, staff meetings, and outside college or university courses.

In 2000, OutFront started requiring students to attend a three to four day orientation before attending classes. Individual study was slowly replaced by small group instruction directly targeted toward the student's lowest level, whether it was math, reading, or writing. The determinant of these small groups was the CASAS competencies which measure skills needed to work toward passing the GED, and is the basis of measurable outcomes in adult education in Kansas. Measurable outcomes became increasingly more difficult to obtain. Three years ago, educational gain was achieved when a student demonstrated certain technology or workplace skills as defined by the Kansas Board of Regents. Two years ago, those measures for educational gains were dropped, and the educational gains were counted by progressing a level through CASAS testing or by passing the GED. Other outcomes, such as obtaining or retaining employment, achiev-

ing citizenship skills, and entering postsecondary education, were also counted, but not in the percent of educational gains.

## **Obstacles and Solutions**

We faced many issues and obstacles during the past two decades as society experienced a fast change. Some of the more pressing issues that we had to deal with regularly were:

1. Helping students catch up if their attendance was poor. Therefore, OutFront instituted a stricter attendance policy. If a learner missed class three times in a month, he or she was suspended until the beginning of the next class session. Class sessions were seven to eight weeks, depending on holidays.

2. Dealing with the maturity level of the 16 to 18 year olds learners in our ABE program. Teenage issues were dealt with on an individual basis keeping clear limits in mind. Some of the "drama" experienced at the center was related to the learners becoming emotionally and sexually involved with each other, and later breaking up. Instructors often played the role of a counselor and provided examples of adult coping methods. It must be mentioned that the ESL classes and evening ABE classes at OutFront did not have the same amount of "drama" since the students were older, more mature, and usually in more stable family relationships.

3. The success of the ABE learners depended upon the instructor's level of cultural competency and understanding, including knowing the culture of modern teenagers. Instructors had to be flexible and knowledgeable in relationship to cultural and racial differences so they could treat each learner equitably. The instructor needed to instill in each student that success was achievable .

4. Managing the classroom was a problem if groups were smaller than five or larger than ten. Having a Workplace Essential Skills (WES) and a technology instructor helped us manage class size. Students were scheduled to participate in the computer lab if one ABE or ESL group was too large.

Curriculum has changed dramatically since 2003. Prior to 2003, individual study was the primary course of learning. This was determined by the state not to be cost-effective. Since instituting more structured, small group classes, the percentage of educational gains increased, and the gains were more quickly achieved. For example, in Fiscal Year (FY) 2006, OutFront had 69% level completions, measured by CASAS diagnostics, compared to the state average of 63%. Also, in FY06, OutFront had 92% completion of those with the goal of obtaining a GED, whereas the state average was 69%. This differential might be attributed to the different demographics of our community and its relationship to Ft. Leavenworth.

## **Students' Voices**

A survey was given to all adult learners in May 2007. The purpose of this survey was to determine what types of instruction and policies were effective in helping learners achieve their goals. We asked students six questions:

1. What has worked for you to help you learn at OutFront? Students' responses included positive remarks related to the instructors' teaching skills and small group atmosphere. Other responses included indicators that adult

learners need to have positive feeling—something they did not feel in traditional school settings. One learner wrote, “What has worked for me is that I am not as ashamed as I was because I understand that there are others that are like me who are trying to get educated and feel the same way I did.” Another learner answered, “The time and effort the teachers have made to help me learn.”

2. What is not working well for you at OutFront? The learners indicated that they wished they could attend longer hours. One learner wrote, “The only thing that does not work is the time the center opens. I wish that class would start at 7:30 or 8:00.” (OutFront opens at 8:30 a.m.). Another learner wrote that a problem is “...the short time. I would like to stay here longer.” (Classes run for three hours). Yet another learner stated that the seats were uncomfortable.

3. Why did you come to OutFront in the beginning? The primary reasons learners came to OutFront were either to learn English or to pass the GED. Almost 100% percent of ABE learners stated they needed to get a GED. Only about one percent of the students indicated a desire to simply increase their basic math, reading, or writing skills to obtain better employment.

4. What roadblocks did you face to attend OutFront? Roadblocks to learning were discussed during orientation and dealt with thereafter on a daily basis. Main roadblocks for the students were: transportation; sick children; husbands being deployed to the Iraq war; fear of not being able to learn because of age or past educational experiences; ability to wake up in the morning; transportation problems; psychiatric disorders; and family interference. Because transportation was the most common roadblock, we discussed with the groups sharing rides or getting transportation assistance from the Council on Aging, located next door to our center. Many students felt that our location helped with the problem by being centrally located and close to the northeast section of town where most of our learners lived.

5. What are your families' educational backgrounds? Only three of the 17 students indicated they had an immediate family member with a college degree. Two had family members with “some college”, and the remaining either had family members with high school diplomas or no degrees at all. Their families may give lip service to the importance of education, but their inability to overcome personal and educational roadblocks interfered with their ability to further their education. It was always exciting to attend graduation and see families applaud the first child in their family's history to ever receive a high school diploma.

6. How do you feel your instructors respond to your needs? Some students stated that the instructors responded very well to their needs and were very caring; that they would help students with anything and tell them what to do; and that they were attentive, concerned about the students' well-being, and offered much encouragement. It is imperative that instructors interact well with the learners.

### **Suggestions for a Successful Adult Basic Education Center**

Adult basic education in the future needs to continue providing small, structured group instruction and to ensure individual study opportunities for those whose attendance is interrupted by family problems. This is not an easy task for centers or instructors because the pressure to achieve certain percentages of educational gains wears on instructors. One instructor this year said, “I feel like a used car salesman. If I don't sell enough cars or get enough educational gains, even if the student didn't attend long enough, I'm in trouble.” Kansas has historically had such high achievement in percentages of level completions and GEDs, it is difficult to maintain the required educational gains.

With public school districts doing more to keep students in traditional high school, adult education needs to reach out more to adults over 18 years to encourage them to complete the GED in order to become more employable. Funds for advertising, such as radio and television public announcements, are needed to reach this population. Flyers in libraries or churches do not reach most people in need of completing high school. Employers need to support their entry level staff to attend class or even provide room to have classes held at their facilities for students who don't speak adequate English or who need to complete the GED.

In some areas in Kansas, adult education enrollments are declining, as they were at OutFront since 2005. Yet, the programs offered by adult learning centers are still greatly needed by those who don't succeed elsewhere. One student summed it up by stating, “No one else ever cared about me. I never thought I could get my GED, but I have. My teacher didn't care about me being 'weird' and took the time to help me.”

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# Wichita: A Diverse Adult Basic Education Program in an Urban Center

Margaret Harris

## The History of Wichita's Diversity

Wichita, incorporated in 1870 as a village, is the largest city in Kansas. It is the county seat of Sedgwick County, located at the junction of the Arkansas Rivers in south central Kansas. Westward expansion and financial rewards attracted the first White settlers to the area in the 1850s and 1860s looking to profit from hunting and trapping wildlife and to trade with the native American population, the Wichita Indians, who had moved north from Oklahoma and built a permanent settlement in 1863. By 1886, Wichita had established itself as the region's principal city due to the arrival of the railroad in 1872, making Wichita a destination for Texas cattle being driven north along the Chisholm Trail for shipment to eastern markets. This industry, along with the grain and milling markets, led to rapid growth. *Vaqueros* (Mexican cowboys) arrived from Mexico to help with roping, branding, and managing the large herds of cattle. They remained in Wichita and other Midwestern communities as the cattle industry and opportunities for continued work grew. Wichita's earliest history is of a place where different cultures and races worked side-by-side, mixed, and mingled to accomplish common goals.

Early in the 20th century, Wichita earned its distinction as the "air capital" after the first plane, the Cessna Comet, was manufactured there in 1917. Thousands of aircraft manufacturing jobs came to Wichita in the early 1940s as a result of WWII and thousands more in 1951 as a result of the boom associated with the activation of the Wichita Air Force Base (renamed McConnell in 1954). Wichita's entrepreneurial spirit led to its rise to national prominence with the development of such companies as Mentholatum, Boeing, Beech, Lear, Cessna, Coleman, White Castle, Pizza Hut, and Koch Industries. Wichita remains a manufacturing, financial, educational and cultural center into the 21st century (City of Wichita, n.d.).

The population of Wichita in 1960 was 254,700 and increased continually between 1960 and 2000. Wichita's population increased by 8.6% from 1960 to 1970, 1.0% from 1970 to 1980, 8.8% from 1980 to 1990, and 13.3% from 1990 to 2000. In 2000, the population in Wichita had grown to 344,284. The racial and ethnic composition of Wichita includes Whites, African Americans, Asians (including Pacific Islanders), American Indians, and Hispanics. The decades between 1950 and 1970 saw a major shift in the city's racial

makeup as the African American population increased significantly. Until 1950 African Americans made up about 5% of the population with little variation. Over two decades, their numbers increased from 8,082 (4.8%) in 1950 to 26,841 (9.7%) in 1970, a 230% increase. From 1980 to 2000, the Hispanic population in Wichita grew from 13,057 to 40,353—from 2.96% of the population to 7.4%. The Asian population in Wichita during these same years grew from 4,608 to 15,426—from 1.04% to 2.83% of the population. Both the Hispanic and Asian populations nearly tripled from 1980 to 2000, and with this growth came many challenges for the Wichita community. This also marked the beginning of the decline of a White majority. Even though the White population has increased from 160,000 in 1950 to about 260,000 in 2000, the percentage of the population has dropped from 95% to 75% (CensusScope, n.d.a).

Approximately 16,000 Wichita households earned less than a \$10,000 annual wage in 1999. Sixty-six per cent of students attending public schools in Wichita qualified for free or reduced price lunch in the 2006-2007 school year. The graduation rate is below the state average—66.4% compared to the state average of 77.7%; and the dropout rate is above the state average—3.7% compared to the state average of 1.5%. These numbers are not atypical of similar urban cities in the Midwest (Kansas State Department of Education, n. d.).

## The Growth of Adult Basic Education

On March 15, 1962, President Kennedy signed into law the Manpower Development Training Act (MDTA) of 1962. This federal legislation was the result of discussion and fear about automation, technological changes, and obsolete skills that would lead to widespread unemployment. The act called for assistance in training difficult-to-place persons, such as those with criminal records, foreign-speaking, and the chronically unemployed adults. The Wichita Board of Education approved the establishment of MDTA programs in Wichita on October 15, 1962. The focus at that time was strictly employment and teaching technical skills needed to secure employment. MDTA was operated in conjunction with the East High School Vocational Department and Continuing Education, which was responsible for all adult education for the school system. In 1974, Public Law 93-380, Title VI, Part A of the 1974 Amendments to Elementary and Secondary Education Act, introduced by Congressman Perkins of Kentucky and signed by President Ford, provided for bilingual adult education (Van Meter, 1978).

During the 1970s and 1980s, there was a huge influx of refugees into Wichita. Once the United States left Vietnam, refugees from Indochina (Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos) started arriving in the United States. The United States State Department allowed these refugees to come to the United States through volunteer resettlement agencies—VOLAG's. Catholic Charities and the Lutheran Social Services were two VOLAG's in Wichita that helped to resettle the Indochinese refugees into the Wichita community. When these families arrived, it was the responsibility of the VOLAG to take care of them for the first year by assisting them with rent and providing all essential supplies. Later, under the Family Re-unification Program, more and more refugees arrived from Indochina.

When a person arrived in the United States as a refugee, as opposed to as an immigrant, he or she was a legal resident and was allowed to legally work. Refugee families were eligible to receive welfare and food stamps. In return, it was mandatory for them to attend English classes at authorized locations such as the Wichita Indochi-

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nese Center (WIC) and the Wichita Area Technical College (WATC). In addition to teaching English, these agencies taught the refugees life skills and helped them to become productive citizens (Kambampati, personal communication, 2007). During the late 1970s, the Wichita school district, through their division of vocational education, operated English as a second language (ESL) classes at the Dunbar Adult Center as well as at various community centers. At that time, the classes consisted of mostly refugees from Indochina. These students from both North and South Viet Nam often attended the same class, creating uncomfortable situations at times (Shoniber, personal communication, 2007).

In 1981, P.L. 97-35, Amendments to the Adult Education Act (AEA), signed by President Reagan, created the first discretionary program to support ESL programs (NAEPDC, 1998). The WIC was founded in 1983 as a non-profit corporation to assist refugees from Indochina. Later, WIC served refugees from other countries including Iraq, Russia, Bosnia, and Somalia. Funding for WIC ESL classes was provided initially by the State Department funneled through a refugee coordinator working for Social and Rehabilitative Services (SRS) in Topeka, the state capitol. Since 1994, WIC has been funded first by grants from the Kansas Department of Education then by grants from the Kansas Board of Regents (M. Kambampati, personal communication, April 19, 2007). P.L. 100-297 (Hawkins/Stafford Elementary/Secondary School Improvement Amendments of 1988), signed April 28, 1988, by President Ronald Reagan, created workforce literacy and English literacy grant programs (NAEPDC, 1998).

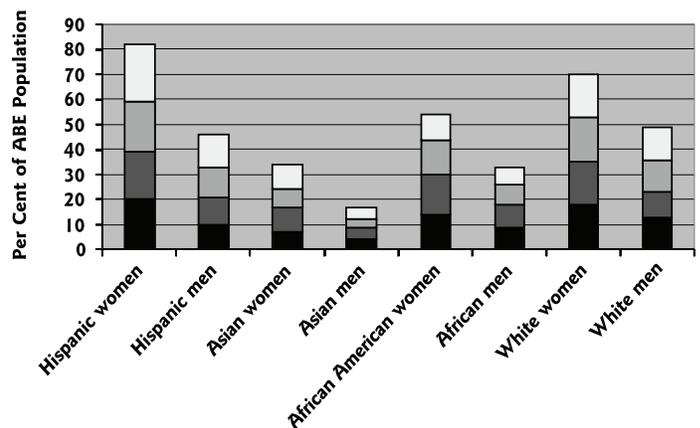
Except for the American Indians, African Americans are the oldest minority group in Wichita dating back to the free-state movement prior to the Civil War. As the White population decreased incrementally from 1980 to 2000, the African American population grew by over 10,000—from 7.3% of the population in 1980 to 11.4% of the population by 2000 (CensusScope, n.d. b). In 2003, WATC's adult education program served 1,278 participants, and 23% of them were African American (Kansas Board of Regents, n.d.). At the same time, there were 618 adults incarcerated in the Sedgwick County Jail, and 470, or 76%, of those incarcerated were African American (Freeman, 2007). In 2004, Wichita's population dropped slightly to 359,665. Participation in the adult education program at WATC decreased slightly by about 10% to 1,144, and the number of incarcerated African American adults rose to 499, or 80% of incarcerated adults that year. The next year, 2005, showed another slight decline in Wichita's population to 358,870, with a drop in participation in the adult education program to 893, and a slight drop in the number of incarcerated African American adults to 479, or 79% of the jail's population.

During the post-Vietnam era, the primarily Mexican-American community in Wichita broadened to welcome individuals from Central America, South America, Puerto Rico, Cuba, Spain, and various Caribbean Islands. The Hispanic population became more and more diversified, and the vast array of cultures and customs with the Hispanic/Latino community grew (Orlando, personal communication, 2007). In Wichita, the late 1980s brought more Hispanics into the ESL classes at WATC. Hispanics made up the majority of students in the classes held evenings during that time. Although various churches and Catholic Charities have offered English classes in the Wichita community, presently the WIC and WATC are the largest providers of ESL

instruction in Wichita. Of the two, WATC provides the majority of ESL instruction in Wichita, serving over 600 students in fiscal year 2007.

Between fiscal years 1997 and 2006, WATC's program served approximately 3,000 ESL learners. From 1997 to 2005, the ESL population remained steady at about 250 to 300 students annually. In 2006, the population nearly doubled to a little over 500 learners, and, in 2007, the population grew to over 550 learners. The growth in the ESL population at WATC has been mostly attributed to growth in the Hispanic population, especially in the Hispanic women's population. In the adult basic education (ABE) program, including ESL students, the percentage of Hispanics grew from 30% in 2003 to 36% of all students in 2006, with the percentage of Hispanic women growing from 20% to 23% and the percentage of Hispanic men growing from 10% to 13% during that same time period. In comparison, during that same time period, the percentage of Asian learners grew from 11% to 15%, with women students growing 7% to 10% and men from 4% to 5%; but African American learners declined from 23% to 17%, with women declining from 14% to 10% of all students and men declining from 9% to 7%. White learners also declined, from 31% to 30% of all students, with women declining from 18% to 17% and men remaining steady at 13% (Kansas Board of Regents, n. d.). (See Figure 1.)

**Figure 1**  
**Percentage of Adult Basic Education Students by Race/Ethnicity, 2003–2006**



### Lisa's Story

Lisa S. (a pseudonym) arrived in the United States in 1986 with her husband and two daughters after escaping from Laos in 1983 to a refugee camp in Thailand. She was 28 years old, and her husband was 32. She and her husband learned a little "survival" English for about three months while living in a Philippine camp for about five months awaiting paperwork that would allow them to go to the United States. They arrived in the United States understanding some but speaking virtually no English. Their children also went to school at the camp and learned a little English. Lisa's parents and younger sisters had escaped in 1975 to Thailand. Her mother was originally from Thailand and had a sister who still lived there, but her parents and sisters lived in a refugee camp. Her father had been a soldier in Laos during the Viet Nam War and had been injured during the war. Her parents and sisters came to the United States in 1979 and lived

in Virginia where a church that sponsored their arrival was located. They remained in Virginia until 1982. After her younger sister married, she and her husband moved to Wichita, along with her parents and remaining sister. Lisa, her husband, and children joined their family in Wichita upon arrival in the United States. Lisa's parents sponsored their immigration. The immigration process lasted almost two years. The United States had ceased accepting Indochinese refugees between 1980 and 1983 except for parents or children of refugees already living in the United States.

Lisa worked part-time as a secretary/clerk in Laos and was a student, and her husband had been a teacher for grades one through three. In Laos, the education system had grades one through six; then students went to college for two years of general studies. A major was chosen in the third year, and students graduated after the fourth year—at age 18 or 19. A student had to be 14 years old to begin college. Most students ended their education after the sixth grade and went to work. During grades one through three, students studied reading, writing, the alphabet, and some math. During grades four through six, they studied geometry and higher mathematics. Both Lisa and her husband attended college in Laos. College graduates were able to teach and work in other professions after college. If one wished to become a doctor, lawyer, or a college professor, three additional years of college were required. Students learned French in grades four through six and then studied either English or French in college. Lisa learned the English alphabet in college but not how to read or speak. The school system changed, however, when the Communists took over. Initially, Laos had a system modeled after the French. Afterwards, the system was more like the American school system with middle school and high school. Lisa and her husband led a comfortable life until the Communist occupation. Her parents fled with two of their children immediately after the Communists arrived, but Lisa, who was married, stayed behind.

When Lisa and her husband arrived in Wichita, they immediately looked for a school where they could learn English in order to secure jobs. They were obligated to repay the cost of their airplane tickets to the United States government after being here six months. The WIC operated an ESL class in the apartment complex where they resided, so she and her husband studied English for three hours a day, Monday through Friday for three months. Her husband got a job with a lawn company for a couple of months where language was not important. He then took a math test, passed, and attended a welding program for six months. He completed the training without the benefit of knowing very much English and secured employment where his brother-in-law was employed so that he could interpret for him. He continued to go to school in 1992 at the Dunbar Adult Center (WATC) as well and was able to complete the requirements for an Adult Performance Level High School Diploma in 1994.

Lisa also started ESL classes at the Dunbar Adult Center in 1992. She, however, wanted to pursue her General Educational Development (GED) High School Diploma and has continued to attend the WATC (formerly Dunbar Adult Center) classes, with a break in attendance from 1996 to 2004. She has also been employed, mostly at two jobs, throughout her educational pursuit. She started working in 1987 as a housekeeper/babysitter for a prominent Wichita family for whom she continues to work. In 1994, she took a second job with a graphics company where she worked for ten years. She then worked for an electrical wiring company for a year to get experience for employment in the aircraft industry. She has worked in the aircraft

industry since 2005. She and her husband raised two daughters, a lawyer and a registered nurse, and a son, born in the United States, who is presently attending college. She successfully completed her GED in May, 2007.

In Lisa's first neighborhood there were no other Laotian immigrants. Over the years there were, at times, Thai immigrants, whose language is similar to Lisa's, so they could communicate. Most times, however, Lisa had Vietnamese and Cambodian neighbors, and communication was not easy. She recalls communicating by drawing or pantomiming and by using body language. The elementary school in their neighborhood was filled to capacity when they arrived, which meant her children had to be bused. In 1989, Lisa and her husband bought their first home, but again there were no Laotian neighbors. Because of her work schedule today, she does not have much contact with the neighbors although her children have always had contact with the neighborhood children, and their friends are mostly American natives. Although most Asians are Buddhists, her family is Christian. Her church preaches the sermon in English but does provide translations in Laotian and Thai.

### **Monica's Story**

Hispanics have been a part of Wichita history almost from the beginning, having come to help with the growth of the cattle industry, then finding regular employment on the ranches and settling into family life and welcoming family members as they, too, emigrated from Mexico. The Hispanic community became continually integrated into the greater community and society of Wichita as the population continued to grow throughout the early 20th century, and restaurants, stores, and other services emerged to meet the needs of these new citizens.

Monica (a pseudonym), a 44-year-old Mexican student, has lived in the United States for 12 years. She had lived here a month when she met her current husband and married him. Her husband is a White American. Monica remembers traveling across the border into Texas and going to the McDonald's restaurant. She was impressed with the bright lights and the apparent affluence of Americans. She believed that all White people were rich! She describes Mexico as a "very poor country." She and her first husband, a Mexican, owned a toy store in Mexico and were considered to be middle class business owners. They owned their home and a car. She and her first husband had one child together. Her husband was abusive, and she ended up divorcing him. Divorce was not an option in her family's eyes, so she was shunned by them. The divorce and the aftermath made leaving her country more desirable, along with the hope of marrying a nice, rich, White American.

Although she has been remarried 12 years and has a son with her American husband, this second marriage has also been difficult. They have attended counseling, but Monica fears this marriage, too, might end in divorce. Monica remains a resident alien even though she badly wants to become a United States citizen. She was involved in a domestic violence incident with her husband not long after marrying him. At the time, she could not speak much English and feels that she admitted to things to the police unknowingly. As a result of that incident, she believes that she has a felony, and felons cannot petition for American citizenship. She would like to get a lawyer to assist her with this problem. Monica has worked as a custodian for the school district for almost six years and feels that she could not

have passed the background check for new employment if a felony for domestic violence remained on her record.

Monica lives in an African-American neighborhood with a few Hispanic and White families. She cooks mostly Mexican food and has no problem finding the ingredients that she needs in the local grocery stores. Sometimes she shops at a Mexican grocery store in the mostly Hispanic neighborhood on the north side of town. She says that she has not had any problems with discrimination, and she has come to the realization that all Whites are not rich in America. She feels now that they are the same as everyone else—no better, no worse. Monica visits her home in Mexico twice each year, and her mother and adult daughter come to Wichita once each year to visit her family.

Monica completed the eighth grade in Mexico and did not learn to speak any English before coming to the United States. Monica has attended the ESL program at WATC since February 2006. Prior to that, she learned English from watching television and from coworkers. Monica's first employment was as a maid in a hotel. She says that lots of female workers who are illegal immigrants take "anything from the bosses" because they are afraid of losing their jobs; nor do they complain about other employees, working conditions, wages, or other problems they may have with their jobs. Monica has become very good friends with a coworker at the school where she works. He helps her with her schoolwork and uses the Bible to help her to learn English. Attending adult education classes has not only helped Monica learn English and other necessary skills, it has also helped her to integrate into society and become accustomed to Wichita as her new home.

### **William's Story**

The majority of the African Americans in Wichita reside in the northeast section of the city. In 2004, there was an increase in homicides and overall crime activity in and around this area. The Wichita Police Department's Patrol North Bureau staff researched crime statistics, listened to neighborhood concerns, and then developed a comprehensive survey designed to elicit input from the citizens. The Wichita Police Department practices the "Community Policing Philosophy" that focuses on prevention by forming community partnerships to solve problems and to address community concerns. The response area designated as "44 beat" encompasses an area in the northeast section that is a socially and economically depressed. This area experiences higher crime rates than other neighborhoods within the city limits of Wichita, has lower median household incomes, more rental properties than private residences, and a high number of abandoned/vacant homes (Kasperek, Pierce, Newman, Nolte, & Norris, 2006). Because of the department's belief in citizen empowerment, a new program called "44 Beat Revitalization of a Neighborhood" was initiated in 2006. The citizens of that neighborhood were surveyed with the intent of discovering their perceptions of crime in their neighborhood and their expectations of the police and other city departments.

When asked how safe the respondents felt in their neighborhood, many shared that safety for them was not measured compared to the city as a whole but compared to how they were affected in their specific neighborhood. One person, for example, felt that the level of safety in her neighborhood was improved because she was now able to sleep in her bed as opposed to sleeping on the floor due to the common occurrence of drive-by shootings. Her residence still

bore evidence of the past shootings, including five patched bullet holes scattered across the front of the residence. The top three concerns identified by citizens were drug activity, abandoned houses, and gangs. Also identified as concerns were: racial profiling; police harassment; police looking the other way when problems arise in the neighborhood; police officers walking by without acknowledging their presence; and slow police response time to 911 calls. They were also concerned that the cost of utilities is higher in their neighborhood than in other neighborhoods in the city and there is no pizza delivery in their neighborhood.

William (a pseudonym), an 18-year old former student in WATC's ABE program, says that the problem for young, African American males in Wichita is that White people think that they are all gang members. Most young, African American males follow the hip-hop dress code—sagging pants, long t-shirts, and "do-rags" (head coverings). He feels that older Whites are afraid of young, African American males and judge them unfairly. Whites, William believes, feel that all young, African American males carry guns, are gangsters, and are, "...up to no good." William says that his mother placed him in the ABE program when he turned 16 because he was having problems in the comprehensive high school he was attending. He was getting suspended from school too often, and he felt that school was "stupid". He said that he was constantly getting blamed by his White teachers for things he had not done. He felt as if the White principal was looking for excuses to get rid of him and "all the other Black kids" in his school. He was convinced that the only African American students who felt wanted at his school were the "nerds" and the athletes. William has been stopped several times by police while driving. He was taken to the Juvenile Detention Facility when he was stopped for a traffic violation, searched, and charged with possession of marijuana. He says that the officer claimed to have smelled marijuana when he was stopped, but William insists that he had not been smoking in his car. He does admit, however, that he did have marijuana in his possession when searched. He feels that he was a victim of racial profiling.

In 2000, the Wichita Police Department, assisted by a working group of community representatives, collected data to assess race-based policing in routine enforcement activities. The effort, entitled "The Wichita Stop Study," was directed by a professor from the Midwest Criminal Justice Institute, School of Community Affairs, Wichita State University (Withrow, 2002). The data were analyzed in four key areas: (1) the decision to stop a car; (2) the events during the stop itself; (3) the decision to search the driver and the car; and (4) the results of the stop. The results of the study indicated that although the general reason for the stop was consistent throughout all racial and ethnic groups, there appeared to be some overall disparity with respect to the race of the individual stopped. African American citizens were being stopped at a disproportionately higher rate than White, Asian, Native American, other race, and Hispanic citizens when compared to their proportional representation throughout the community. Results also indicated that contrary to previous research findings, African American citizens were more likely to have slightly briefer stops than non-African American citizens. However, stops involving African American citizens were more likely to involve physical resistance, and consistent with previous research findings, African American and Hispanic citizens were more likely to be searched when compared to other groups. Overall, the study suggested that there was a disparity with respect to race and

ethnicity within some of the routine enforcement practices of the Wichita Police Department although it could not be determined from the results of this study how much of this disparity, if any, was based on racial or ethnic prejudice.

William, like other African American students at WATC, is very much aware of the daily prejudice he faces in Wichita. One way WATC has addressed this issue is to hire teachers and staff that reflect the cultures and ethnicity of our students. We also strive not to judge people on their appearance. A White support staff member of the ABE center admits that she feels intimidated by the young, African American males in our program. After attending a workshop on “Gangs 101” facilitated by school district security personnel, she was convinced that an African American student who had rolled up only one pant leg was a gang member. She was also convinced that another African American student was a gang member because she was wearing a head covering, only to discover that the head covering was being worn to cover a “bad hair day”. In a community where there is great diversity, segregation and prejudice, the future success of our school is dependent upon overcoming stereotypes and creating a safe environment for both our students and employees.

### **Participating in Wichita’s Political Structure**

“Visioneering Wichita” (2004) is a 20-year plan for south central Kansas. It encourages community collaboration and assists groups with common interests to form strategic alliances to tackle community issues. Visioneering Wichita began in June 2004. Visioneering Wichita concerns itself with “far-reaching, but attainable goals to make the region an excellent place to live.” The vision and goals were developed using a process involving thousands of citizens representative of the four counties—Sedgwick, Sumner, Butler, Harvey—that comprise Wichita’s Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA).

Key benchmarks are used to measure progress toward goals each year. Strategies in six interdependent foundations require that the community work together in order to make progress. The six foundations are: Economic development; education; quality of life; government; infrastructure; and private sector leadership. Visioneering Wichita has a vision for each of the foundations:

- Economic Development— Before 2024, the Wichita MSA will be a leading community for retaining and expanding current businesses and creating and recruiting new businesses.
- Education— Before 2024, the Wichita MSA will have a globally competitive education system that encourages and supports life-long learning and contributes to the social, cultural, and economic vitality of our diverse community.
- Quality of Life— Before 2024, the Wichita MSA will be a healthy, safe community that has a vibrant recreation, entertainment, arts and cultural focus that embraces diversity and builds pride.
- Government— Before 2024, the Wichita MSA will be a national model for effective, efficient, inclusive, accountable governments that are representative of the community’s needs and desires.
- Infrastructure— Before 2024, the Wichita MSA will have adequate infrastructure to support downtown, urban, and suburban neighborhoods that will enhance quality of life and promote economic development.
- Private Sector Leadership— Before 2024, the Wichita MSA will be a community where citizens actively participate in

public/private leadership that makes the Wichita MSA competitive regionally, nationally, and globally. (Visioneering Wichita, n.d.)

Key to each foundation are goals and strategies to reach the goals. Strategic Alliances, comprised of vision partners, are formed around these goals and strategies. One such alliance is Racial Diversity—Opportunities and Harmony Strategic Alliance. This alliance takes an “intentional and inclusive” approach to community issues. The alliance wants diversity represented in neighborhoods, civic organizations, and businesses throughout south-central Kansas and is striving for inclusion by understanding the region’s perception about race and diversity. The goal of this alliance is to ensure that south central Kansas understands all cultures and embraces racial diversity.

Strategies for this alliance include:

- Understand, celebrate, and embrace all cultures and racial diversity.
- Encourage interaction among all people and break down barriers.
- Encourage employers to be committed to a racially diverse workforce. Recognize that “Visioneering” will not succeed in meeting its key benchmarks without achieving racial diversity, opportunity, and harmony.
- Promote the integration and inclusion of immigrants into the community and workforce.
- Treat each other with a sense of fairness, respect, and creativity while accepting our differences.
- Establish an environment that welcomes, attracts, and retains minorities in our community and workforce.
- Provide equal opportunities for minorities in the workplace, civic events, and volunteer organizations. Provide more diverse board members in order to better represent all community members.
- Promote south central Kansas as a diverse community.

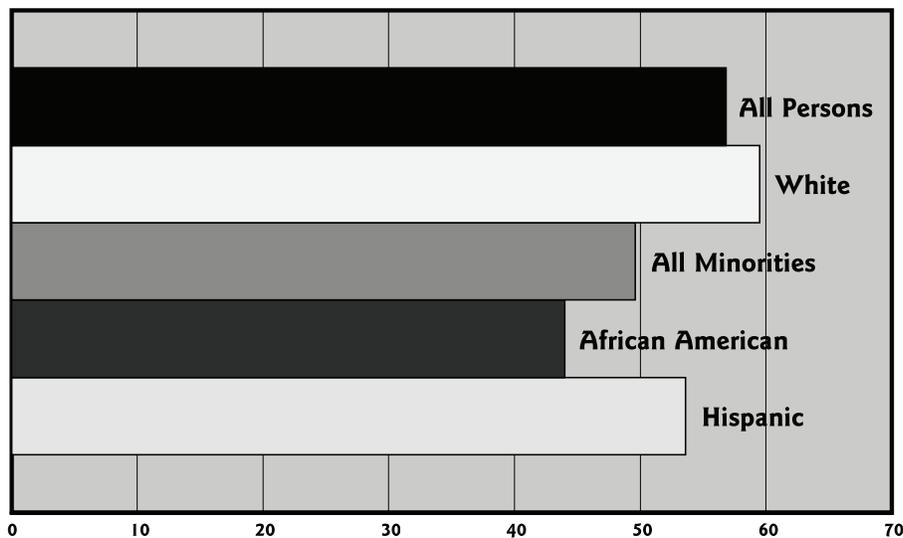
During January and February 2006, a web-based survey was conducted in order to measure Wichita MSA residents’ perceptions of racial diversity, harmony, and issues in social interaction, jobs, education, healthcare, and leadership. The survey was available to respondents in both Spanish and English. There were 2,532 respondents. The answers were analyzed and summarized into one measure that showed the prevailing perceptions of racial opportunity and harmony in the community. Values ranged from 0 to 100, with an index of 50 or greater indicating generally positive perceptions of harmony and equality of racial opportunity. The distance from 50 showed more positive or more negative perceptions. Overall, the results showed that index values varied little across all demographic groupings, i.e., education, age, and income, except race (Harrah & Meissen, 2006). (See the Table for responses to survey items by race.) For 2006, Wichita MSA’s Index of Racial Opportunity and Harmony was 56.8. (See Figure 2 for overall perception scores by race.)

Action steps were created for this alliance based on the results of this survey. Working with community organizations and the Entrepreneurship and Small Business Alliance, Visioneering Wichita introduced a minority business initiative program to help minorities start a successful business or take an existing business to a new level. Any minority resident of the Wichita MSA is eligible for the assistance provided through this initiative. The goal is to grow successful, minority-owned businesses in the Wichita area. All classes,

**Table**  
**Survey Results by Race/Ethnicity**

Survey Statements	Values Assigned by Race/Ethnicity (0-100)			
	White	African American	Hispanic	Other Races
Actions are taken to improve relations between people of different races in my community.	58.8	45.4	53.2	49.4
People of different races get along with each other in my community.	62.0	55.8	59.7	58.1
Children of different races have an equal chance of getting a good education in my community.	63.3	43.5	55.3	50.0
People of different races have equal opportunities to go to college in my community.	63.7	47.1	52.6	52.1
Racial issues create much conflict in my community.	59.7	48.0	52.1	50.6
People of different races have an equal chance of getting a job in my community.	58.8	33.5	50.3	43.1
People of different races have equal opportunities to start a business in my community	59.9	32.9	53.7	44.8
Difficulties regarding issues are a thing of the past in my community.	38.8	24.2	37.1	30.9
My community faces more conflict over racial issues than other communities.	68.6	56.3	62.6	61.4
Issues between people of different races will improve in my community.	62.5	52.2	59.1	56.0

**Figure 2**  
**Overall Perception Score by Race**



mentoring, and most of the cost of materials will be free to participants.

Visioneering Wichita also announced a new strategic alliance at its 2007 annual business meeting—Literate Communities. This alliance will coordinate with technical skills training and life-long education initiatives to provide the soft skills and literacy necessary for potential employees to be competitive. The goal of this initiative is to help the Wichita MSA become a Certified Literate Community. The alliance will seek to engage all providers of adult basic education in the region in order to accomplish its goal.

In order to survive, ABE programs in Wichita have to show that they contribute to the economic and community development of the community. Education for the sake of education is not a viable strategy. Although Lisa's, Monica's, and William's stories are not unique, they represent a small fraction of the travails that students at WATC face. In order to be an advocate for our students, WATC must develop and participate in organizational and agency collaboration like "Visioneering Wichita". Our school must be a community participant. In Wichita, gone are the days where we could focus solely on instruction and academic advising. ABE and ESL programs over the last two decades were relegated to the shadows of Wichita's education community because we were not active participants in the political community, and, as a result, we lost some of our funding and put our entire program at risk. Visioneering Wichita has offered WATC's ABE program an opportunity to make a significant contribution to community planning and to make the argument that our programs are good not only for the students, but indeed, for the entire community.

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# Improving "Adequacy" Concepts in Education Finance: A Heuristic Examination of the Professional Judgment Research Protocol

R. Craig Wood and R. Anthony Rolle

State legislatures, policy analysts, and researchers are attempting, in many instances, to measure levels of equity as well as the levels of adequacy provided by public elementary and secondary education funding mechanisms (Wood et al., 2007; Wood et al., 2005; Wood & Rolle, 2007). Moreover, education finance researchers generally agree that state education finance distribution formulas should be designed to address differences in educational needs by allocating different levels of financial resources among schools and districts (Mort, 1924). In fact, student weighted formulas date to at least the 1950s, with examples of weighted pupil calculations to adjust for grade level and school size provided in textbooks of the era (Mort & Reusser, 1951; Wood, 2007).

One goal of state education finance aid distributional formulas is to provide students, regardless of their individual backgrounds or their geographic circumstance, with comparable educational opportunities for achievement. Since the emergence of the 1990s accountability movement and subsequent passage of the federal No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, the emphasis of many state education policies has been on improving outcomes and not necessarily providing equitable financial opportunity to achieve them.

Student need driven state education finance formulas are rooted in the assumption that financial resources can be utilized to offset socioeconomic status differences among students. In addition, financial resources can be utilized to enhance equitable opportunities for learning and ultimately can create more equitable student opportunities in otherwise very different environments (Thompson, Wood, & Crampton, in press). As such, education finance distribution formulas tend to strive toward appropriate balances of student needs and societal resources.

State and private agencies have attempted to determine the costs of providing an "adequate" education for public elementary and secondary students. These attempts began in the early 1990s and

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continue to the present. Early attempts concentrated on what is generally termed the Professional Judgment Model. These early attempts utilized a single model that attempted to determine only one fiscal adequacy target. Generally, these types of models were, and continue to be, limited in design, application, and generalizability. Despite these severe limitations, many adequacy studies continue to rely on this methodology.

Over time, three additional models have emerged, i.e., Successful Schools, Statistical Analysis, and Evidenced-Based, each with strengths and weaknesses. As such, collectively, these four models tend to suggest a range of adequacy targets that should be the goal of an adequate expenditure range. Each model must be carefully designed and utilized in order for generalizable conclusions to emerge.

Without acknowledging such caveats, great caution must be exercised regarding typical education finance adequacy studies. Most of these studies are presented as scientifically-based investigations. However, in reality, any objective education finance research examination of these studies reveals evidence that they are opinion pieces guided and funded by private organizations that have specific political, social, and economic objectives regarding public elementary and secondary schools. While some of these goals may be notable and sincere, such studies are largely suspect and necessarily should be viewed carefully.

More importantly, all such adequacy studies are limited if they do not attempt to utilize all four present models. In fact, only a handful of studies have attempted to utilize all four models in terms of offering state legislatures aspirational targets of expenditures (Wood et al., 2007). Yet, the vast majority of studies tend to utilize models selectively in providing for various socio-political agendas in support of increased educational expenditures without comment on the exclusion of the remaining methodologies that may or may not support such claims. Thus, the agenda of these individuals is to support high expenditure studies, attack state legislative expenditure studies, and to ignore commonly accepted methodologies for determining adequate levels of educational expenditures.

## **The Four Methodologies: Determining Levels of Adequate Spending on Education**

In order to identify adequacy target expenditures, four education finance models currently are found within the education finance research literature.

- Professional Judgment Model;
- Statistical Analysis Models;
- Evidenced-Based Model;
- Successful Schools Model.

This article offers a specific research protocol for the Professional Judgment Model to strengthen its utilization while outlining the remaining three models.

### *Professional Judgment Model*

In order for the Professional Judgment Model to have validity in conjunction with the other methodologies, it first must be based upon a statewide survey of every building principal. Most researchers generally omit this critical aspect and, to date, this procedure has been conducted in only two states. Thus, in order to enhance the validity of this model, the model should be a Collective Judgment Model of educators from throughout a given state rather than merely small panels as generally done. From these data, numerous focus group meetings with "expert educators" can then attempt to estimate

**Table**  
**Example of an Overall Professional Judgment Model Calculation**

<b>School Classification</b>	<b>Percentage Increase Recommended (%)</b>	<b>School Prototype Recommendation (\$)</b>	<b>Actual School Expenditure (\$)</b>
Elementary School:			
Large	13.5	12,157	11,168
Medium	16.0	12,996	11,343
Small	21.8	12,840	11,343
Middle Schools:			
Large	1.8	11,706	11,523
Medium	7.9	12,375	11,559
Small	4.0	13,099	12,648
High School:			
Large	2.7	11,380	11,113
Medium	2.1	11,877	11,657
Small	17.9	13,931	12,007

Source: Wood et al. (2007, April).

the adequacy levels for various prototype schools. Depending upon the specifics of a given state, various prototype schools would be created; often these prototype schools reflect small, medium, and large elementary, middle, and high schools.

This process of bringing together expert educators (i.e. expert panels) to determine the required inputs for an adequate education is known as the Professional Judgment Model. This has been the most mostly widely used approach to determine adequacy and has been used by private agenda organizations in many states.<sup>1</sup> The greatest strength of the approach is that expert educators are assumed to be intimately familiar with the needs of schools providing valuable insight as to the required fiscal inputs for an adequate education. However, education finance researchers also observe that when expert educators attempt to determine the level of fiscal adequacy, it also becomes the major limitation of the method. Specifically, these researchers note that educators who will be receiving the services may be biased and overstate the requirements. Furthermore, education finance researchers argue that many adequacy studies generally have far too few participants resulting in invalid samples. Specifically, should 25 educators determine the educational policy for an entire state? Finally, education finance researchers argue different groups of educators may arrive at different results and question the replicability of the approach in general. Notwithstanding these major limitations, the agenda-based studies and organizations continue to ignore these realities and concentrate on limited methodologies with exorbitant expenditure goals.

As a means to overcome the limitation of the Professional Judgment Model's having only a small group of individuals determine results, the Collective Judgment Model is necessary. In at least two state adequacy studies in which each principal was provided a survey with their corresponding prototype school and asked to provide input on what they considered to be the required adequate fiscal inputs, these limitations were overcome.

The creation of prototype schools is an essential step when undertaking a professional judgment analysis. These hypothetical prototype schools should be based on state specific statistics. Generally, elementary, middle, and high schools are ranked based on enrollment and split into three categories i.e., small, medium, and large. Then the average enrollments within each subgroup are determined along with the percentages of special need students, resulting in nine prototype schools: small, medium, and large prototypes for elementary, middle and high schools. The procedures must be adapted and modified for states that have atypical organizational patterns and populations. For example, an adequacy study for the Montana Legislature contained different prototype patterns from that of the study for the Rhode Island Legislature (Wood et al., 2007).

Along with overcoming the limitation of a small sample size inherent in other professional judgment panels, various and different school expert panels as well as school district panels strengthen the validity of such studies (Wood, Robson, Farrier, Smith, & Silverthorne, 2005). Further validity would be gained by having school expert panels held prior to administration of the survey and one after. The first school expert panel consists of various education entities in a state and, where feasible, all school district superintendents/staff for the district panel. Logistically, due to the numbers of districts, the input panels could consist of several panels operating independently of each other. For the second expert panel, principals from all "high performing" schools could participate. The agenda-oriented and sponsored studies do not attempt to have panels selected in any such manner. Generally, agenda-sponsored studies select individuals from low achieving, high expenditure districts that have not had success as measured by statewide mandates who then, as a result, argue that more moneys are needed. In a bizarre twist reflecting some type of Orwellian logic, the proponents of agenda-based studies reflect that such inclusive procedures, as discussed herein, are not "not up to industry standards" or are of "poor quality." Apparently,

these observations are based upon the relatively lower increases necessary to achieve an adequate education as compared to the agenda-based studies that average 30% or higher expenditure increases.

While information from surveys from all building principals in the state results in valuable information on required inputs, the research protocol then averages the results of the expert panels and thus provides the most valid information. Specifically, allowing educators to discuss the requirements with other educators in a collaborative manner and with a moderator helps overcome any questions or difficulties individual principals may have experienced with the survey.

Results for the prototype schools would then be reported based on school types and sizes along with the required fiscal inputs identified by the professional judgment expert panels. Once these figures are derived, then additional increases would be judged as to additional assistance for students not meeting standards. Additional programs such as summer school, after-school programs, and early morning programs would then be addressed as separate issues. An example of an overall professional judgment calculation taken from a selected state is shown in the table.

#### *Statistical Analysis Models*

Statistical Analysis Models create regression equations utilizing multiple variables to create a curve of best fit (Wood et al., 2007). Increasingly common among recent analyses of educational adequacy are statistical methods that may be used either to estimate: (a) the quantities and qualities of educational resources associated with higher or improved educational outcomes; or (b) the costs associated with achieving a specific set of outcomes in different school districts serving different student populations. The first of these methods is known as the education production function and the second of these methods is known as the education cost function. The two are highly interconnected and—similar to the Successful Schools Model—require state policymakers to establish explicit, measurable outcome goals.

In cost function analysis, the goal is to estimate the cost of achieving a desired set of educational outcomes and further to estimate how those costs differ in school districts with certain characteristics, serving students with certain characteristics. For example, achieving state average outcomes in a high poverty urban school district may have quite different costs than achieving the same outcomes in an affluent suburb. A cost function that has been estimated with existing data regarding school district spending levels and outcomes, and including data regarding district and student characteristics, can be utilized for predicting the average cost of achieving a desired level of outcomes in a school district of average characteristics serving a student population of average characteristics. Further, the cost function can be used to generate a cost index for each school district that indicates the relative cost of producing the desired outcomes in it.

#### *Evidence-Based Model*

The Evidenced-Based Model is built around the concept of identifying costs of multiple educational strategies that appear to be the most successful in maintaining and improving student performance. Examples of effective education strategies identified recently that have met strict evaluation procedure should be utilized. Unfortunately, the bulk of these strategies are virtually impossible to cost out and lack generalizability.

In the Evidence-Based Model, the protocol attempts to integrate a variety of “proven effective” input strategies such as class size

reduction, specific interventions for special student populations, and comprehensive school reform models rather than relying on a single reform model. Evidence-Based Models do not, however, reflect rigorous meta-analysis of all available studies on each possible intervention. Nor does application of evidence-based cost analysis require that the interventions in question be evaluated with respect to specific, policy relevant outcome measures. Thus, various studies purport to be evidenced-based yet use various standards for which studies are chosen.

#### *Successful Schools Model*

The Successful Schools Model is the process of examining the expenditures of schools that are deemed “successful” as measured by state assessments. Successful schools studies utilize student outcome data regarding measures such as attendance, dropout rates, and test scores to identify a set of schools or school districts in a state that meet chosen accountability standards for success. Then, to determine levels of expenditures, an average or some percentile of the expenditures of those schools or school districts is generally considered adequate. The assumption underlying the model is that some schools in the state are able to be successful with that chosen level of funding. Modified successful schools analyses include some consideration of how schools utilize the resources. In most cases, analysts may use data on how schools use the resources to identify and exclude peculiar, or outlier, schools or districts from the successful schools sample (Wood et al., 2007).

### **Discussion**

As discussed earlier, the concept of the state education finance formula would be to offer every public school elementary and secondary student the availability of programs and services appropriate to his or her educational needs which are substantially equal to those available to any similar student notwithstanding geographic differences and varying local economic factors throughout a given state. The intent of this type of investigation is to determine the actual costs of providing an adequate education in a given state. The methodologies, as discussed and implemented, and the resultant targeted expenditures would drive the actual base student allocation for state policymakers. The state legislature would determine these expenditures in order to assure all school districts would have an adequate fiscal amount to provide instructional services.

Of the four models that can presently be utilized, the Professional Judgment Model and the Evidenced-Based Model present less valid and replicable models as compared to the Successful School Model and the Statistical Analysis Model. Specifically, the Professional Judgment Model is open to a host of criticisms and concerns, and reflects the lack of empirical rigor of either the Successful Schools or the Statistical Analysis Model.

If the Professional Judgment Model were to be utilized, and the authors believe that it has some merit, it must be done so while exercising the additional three models as discussed herein. Additionally, if the Professional Judgment Model were to be utilized, the usage of a statewide survey of building principals as described herein as the Collective Judgment Model, must be conducted in order to diminish the concerns of research validity and reliability.

Thus, for state legislatures given the present status and validity of education finance research, it is recommended that the Successful Schools Model and/or the Statistical Analysis Model approach

would be the most fruitful. If either of these two models were to be constructed carefully, a state legislature could produce a targeted expenditure that should be sound and reflect the present state of knowledge in funding public elementary and secondary education.

Of these two models, if one model were chosen, the Successful Schools Model, if carefully designed and crafted, would have the greatest probability of yielding the most useful model. This usefulness is reflected in that this model is the most closely understood by the public and thus reflective of public policy determinations. Again, it must be clearly understood that all the models provide useful information. It also must be clearly understood that certain models are more useful than others. Overall, a state legislature could choose any of the models and justify its actions. However, if the authors were to rank the four models for high to low in terms of their validity and usefulness, they would be listed as follows:

- Successful Schools Model (highest rank);
- Statistical Analysis Model;
- Evidenced-Based Model;
- Professional Judgment Model (lowest rank).

Notwithstanding this ranking, it is the purview of a state legislature to choose the model, combination of models, or ranges that it accepts as having the greatest validity. From the range of models and expenditure patterns, a strong, viable, and valid education finance distribution formula could be crafted.

It is important to note that this assessment has engaged in a heuristic examination of information as to how a state legislature can establish an amount to assure an adequate education for the school children in a given state. The conceptualization of the education finance distribution formula must be practically viewed as an overall child need based formula in order for state policymakers to address how the state legislature might wish to distribute state and local moneys for elementary and secondary education in the state. The actual design of a state aid distributional system is not part of this examination. This examination only addresses the targeted amount that should address the issues of offering an adequate education within a given state.

The state legislature may embrace any one of the methodologies as described herein or any combination of the methodologies. If a legislature were to embrace only one methodology to determine the adequate amount of funding public education, a legislature would be well advised to examine how successful schools, as defined by legislative enactments, could be utilized in meeting the targeted expenditures. If the Successful Schools Model were to take into account various achievement standards as well as those school districts making progress toward achievement levels and a host of other important and significant variables such as student demographics and differing educational needs that could be utilized within this model, it could generate the expenditure targets that could prove to be quite useful for a state legislature. With great care, the creation of a new and viable education finance distribution formula could be coupled to high performance school districts. The high performance school districts could be identified with legitimate adjustments. This model would be similar to the issues as identified in the Statistical Analysis Model and would reflect the aspirational fiscal goals that the state legislature should move toward over a reasonable period of time.

## Reconciling the Various Approaches

In a perfect world, with perfect information regarding the relationship between resources and student outcomes, perfect data regarding student outcomes, and perfect measures of district inefficiency, resource cost and statistical cost function analysis would produce the same results (Wood et al., 2007).

To date, evidence regarding the effectiveness or the cost-effectiveness of Professional Judgment Model and Evidence-Based Model that commonly guide such analyses remains questionable at best (Hanushek, 2007; Levin, 2002; Borman & Hewes, 2002; Borman, Hewes, Overman, & Brown, 2003; Bifulco, Bordeaux, Duncombe, & Yinger, 2002). These reforms are most often introduced within the context of available resources rather than empirically estimated resource needs, and with existing teachers.

Thus, an overview of the four models for determining the fiscal level of educational adequacy leads to the overall conclusion that, if such an approach were adopted by a state legislature, the only valid methodologies would have to include all four models with a display of the strengths and weakness of each model. If the Professional Judgment studies were included, then the procedures as discussed herein would enhance its validity and reliability. The most notable weakness of virtually all Professional Judgment Models to date has been the lack of an attempt to measure the costs via statewide surveys of building principals and other professionals.

## Endnote

<sup>1</sup> Private agenda organizations have conducted professional judgment studies in such states as Nebraska, Indiana, Colorado, Missouri, Kentucky, North Dakota, Montana, New York, and South Dakota.

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