

# *Nuevas voces en el Nuevo Sur* Latino/a Immigrant Youth in Georgia

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“Man, I hate this school!”

THESE WORDS, spoken by a sixth grade student who had emigrated from Mexico, greeted me on my first day as a middle school teacher. I was already leery of my adjustment from high school Spanish teacher to middle school sheltered content social studies teacher, and this student’s comment did nothing to ease my transition. At the time, I did not respond to the young man’s comment with any reply of my own, hoping that the situation would defuse itself and we could proceed with our first day of school procedures. While the student took his seat without further incident, his comment remained with me throughout the day. As the weeks progressed, the comment moved further and further into the recesses of my mind. However, it continued to surface subconsciously throughout that first year and beyond.

My initial concern on that first day of school in August was simply to maintain control of my classroom. When that sixth grader said that he hated our school, what I preliminarily heard was a threat to that control, a threat that I wanted to silence, a threat that needed to be subdued. This was what my years of teacher preparation and experience had taught me. This was the order that administrators wanted to see.

On the surface, the power of that singular comment threatened the boundaries of order that were traditionally defined in classrooms. On a deeper level, however, the comment was more an expression of disappointment with the school, with the teachers, with the students, and even with the world in general. Over time, I came to understand the student’s comment was not intended as a threat to my power, but a call for me to provide my support and advocacy as an educator for marginalized and disadvantaged students. My students, who very likely saw me as another oppressive teacher that first day of school, underwent a similar transformation over time. As we spent more time together in and out of the classroom, my students began to trust that I tried to have their best interests in mind. The change in my students and myself that transpired between that first day of school and our last day of school three years later is the impetus for this article.

***Raíces and Roots: Soy de and I am from***

Growing up in the rural South, I was surrounded by the notion of “roots.” Two kinds of roots, inextricably intertwined, provide my foundation. The ancestral roots of my family can be traced back to Sand Mountain, Alabama, for more than five generations. Those familial roots were nourished by the agricultural roots that continue to dominate the region: the ever-present cotton fields bursting with white in the early fall, the blooms on the potato plants, soybeans ripening in the tawny fields. Biologically speaking, the root system of a plant provides the stem and leaves with the nutrients necessary to sustain life. In order to continue providing that life-sustaining nourishment, the roots must move into new areas of the soil. The same can be said of our ancestral roots.

Growing up on Sand Mountain, I never thought I would move away. As far as I could tell, most people from there never left there. The pull of those ancestral roots remains strong, so strong that it is not uncommon to see adjacent farms with multiple generations of families living and working together alongside one another. The few surviving textile-manufacturing mills employ grandmothers, mothers, daughters, and sisters who are working side-by-side in an effort to make production. A quick scan of the local high school yearbook reveals the same ancestral names on page after page: Brown, Cooper, Hosch, Lambert, Liles, Traylor, Tumlin, Westbrook, Worley—families that have made the northeastern corner of Alabama, this southernmost foothill of the Appalachian mountain chain, their home for hundreds of years.

These are the roots of my youth. These entwined rhizomes have nourished me and have provided a sense of place and belonging for me. When I tell someone I am from Sand Mountain, there is a sense of pride, an acknowledgement of the mountain people with whom I identify. Being from Sand Mountain is a descriptor unto itself. I am from a town with no red light, but with many churches and four police officers. I am from Red Devil football and foot washings. I am from a family who served sweet milk with cornbread as a summer treat. I am from having a garden that we lived on in the summer. I am from going to a storm pit if it was coming up a cloud. I am from a family with Methodist, Baptist, and Holiness roots that continues to defy the unwarranted stereotype of the bigoted, unworldly Southerner. I am from Noah Baze, Louise, Blanche, Leck, Terry, Abiah, Hortense, and a host of other ancestors who called this mountain their home. I am from the same public school that my grandfather attended, and was taught by the same teachers who had taught my mother and most of my cousins. I am from decoration days, prescribed Sundays throughout the year when families clean the graves of those absent from our midst yet forever present in our hearts. I am from dinners on the ground and sitting up all night with the dead. I am from a community that, on the surface, looks like me, talks like me, and thinks like me. I am from a place that still has an occasional snake-handling and an omnipresent understanding that you’d better get right.

Place is present in every conversation on Sand Mountain. Who your people are, what community you live in, what church holds your letter rather than the one you might simply attend: all of these markers indicate an overwhelming sense of place. A quick look at the county’s school names notes just how important place is to those growing up on Sand Mountain. Not one school is named for a person, but rather every school is named for a place: Crossville, Collinsville, Fyffe, Geraldine, Henagar, Ider, Moon Lake, Plainview, Ruhama, Sylvania, Valley Head—all towns and communities on the mountain. Directions are given not by street names and numbers, but rather by a shared sense of place and landmarks (*Go to the Macedonia School, go through the Pocket and turn left*). This shared sense of place continues to push our roots deeper into the mountain soil.

What I am not from is a place of tremendous diversity. In town, you could worship as a Baptist, Methodist, or Church of God congregant. Out in the country, primitive Baptist and Holiness congregations dotted the landscape, with an occasional brush arbor thrown in for good measure. Linguistically, English (or at least our mountain version of it) dominated all conversations. Foreign languages were not taught in the schools nor were they heard in the streets. Politically, we saw the conversion of Yellow Dog Democrats to a more conservative bent. Our yearbook photos showed ancestral lines that reached across the Atlantic to Scotland, Ireland, and other Northern European countries.

As mentioned previously, roots must move into new areas of the soil to acquire nutrients and continue growth. Sometimes roots simply spread out, moving into previously unknown soil in the hopes of meeting the survival needs of the plant. Other times, having outgrown its space, the plant is uprooted and transplanted into new soil with less geographical constraint. The danger in transplantation is amputating the plant's roots while they are still actively growing. The plant needs to maintain its health and memory of place if it is to be successful in its new home. The same can be said of humans.

I did not remain on Sand Mountain. My father's job took us to Middle Georgia, a place that retained some of the markers of home in the midst of previously unknown multiplicities and heterogeneities. Those markers of Sand Mountain allowed me to be transplanted from the tanned fields of Alabama to the red clay of Georgia and still feel comfortable. No longer did my classmates, some of whom were children of military service members, look like me, sound like me, and think like me; rather they were from all over the world in terms of heritage and life-experiences provided by the local Air Force base.

This move to Middle Georgia would foreshadow the diversity that would become central to my experiences as an educator. In my new middle school, the study of foreign languages was emphasized and prized, so much so that I chose to pursue Spanish language learning throughout high school and college. It was there that I truly began to value the varied forms of diversity that have served as hallmarks throughout my adult life.

My story runs counter to the narrative of the uneducated, bigoted Southerner. My story, combined with those of my students, serves to present a counter narrative to a South rooted in exclusion rather than inclusion. This narrative is offered as a testament to collaboration rather than coercion; to research done *by* students and teachers rather than *on* them. Rather than the supposed division imagined by those outside of the South, this narrative serves as a reminder of what can be accomplished when we transcend theoretical, methodological, racial, linguistic, religious and other boundaries to seek justice in our communities. This narrative illuminates what can be accomplished when we no longer live in fear and move from the sidelines of society.

I remain interested in discovering with my students what it means to live as an immigrant in the South today as well as how we can achieve some measure of social justice, both in our schools and our communities. This narrative is grounded in the theoretical framework of transformative critical pedagogy as developed by Cummins (1996, 2000a, 2000b). This work is also informed by research regarding Mexican internal settler colonialism (Falcón, 1995); the social responsibility of teachers in today's diverse society (Darling-Hammond, 2007); deficit theory resistance (Delpit, 1995; Flores-González, 2002; San Miguel & Valencia, 1998; Valenzuela, 1999); hierarchical language function (Young, 2003); bilingual issues surrounding school and home (Valdés, 1996, 2001); the need for White voices to become a part of the multicultural debate (McLaren, 1995b, 1997; Nieto, 2004); the borderlands and *intersticios* experienced by immigrant students (Anzaldúa, 1987); exile pedagogy (He, 2010); the

autobiographical demand of place (Casemore, 2008); and re-placing Southern geographies (Winders, 2009).

*And sometimes, like the students here don't think anybody's different, like everybody's a Mexican, even if they're from Guatemala or El Salvador. You know, like everybody's a Mexican.*

~Alejandra, 12 year old Latina immigrant

*Everything 'bout my life says I'm a Mexican.*

~Jesús, 13 year old Latino immigrant

Just as I can begin my Southern narrative with “I am from,” many of my students can just as naturally begin theirs with “*Soy de*”. The largest immigration into Georgia (and the South as a geographic whole) in recent memory has been from Latin America (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). In a region where separate drinking fountains segregated by race are a not-too-distant memory, Latino/a immigration has, at times, confused a South accustomed to dealing with binarist race relations. This recent wave traces its roots to the 1980s, when Georgia’s poultry processing plants began to look for migrant workers from Latin America in order to meet the United States’ ever-increasing demands (Guthey, 2001). In the poultry plants, migrant workers found more stable, if less safe, employment than they had previously experienced (Griffith, 1995). The wages to be earned in the plants attracted more migrant workers to the region as the poultry work was a more reliable form of employment than following the seasonal crops around the state and the region. These workers became such a staple in poultry processing plants that U.S. poultry companies began recruiting them via billboards in Mexico, advertisements placed in Mexican newspapers, and recruiting trips sponsored by the companies (Guthey, 2001).

Further spurred by the 1996 Centennial Olympic Games, affordable housing, and the preeminence of carpet manufacturing, poultry production, and agriculture, many Latino/as made and continue to make their home in Georgia. The labor stream from Latin America, though decidedly smaller in today’s recession economy, still runs to communities such as Dalton, Athens, Tifton, Vidalia, and Gainesville, with the majority of Georgia’s Latino/a immigrants hailing from Mexico (Bohon, Macpherson, & Atilas, 2005; Davis, Deaton, Boyle, & Schick, 2009; Odem & Lacy, 2009; U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). In many Latino/a communities in Georgia, the Games and the post-Olympic economy provided relatively high-paying jobs without the burden of having to prove one’s legal status (Russakoff, 2006). The combination of Georgia’s relatively inexpensive housing market and the labor shortage spelled economic prosperity for many Latino/a immigrants (Hernández-León & Zúñiga, 2000). This Olympic wave of immigration encouraged Latino/a immigrant families to put down *raíces* that spread from Mexican states like Michoacán and Quintana Roo and Guatemalan departments like Zacapa and Sacatepéquez to the capital city of Georgia and beyond. These new immigrants were putting down new roots—roots that were no longer seasonal or meant to be transplanted, but perennial and meant to be permanent.

### **What does it mean to *be* Southern?**

*“The study of place can illuminate the way we inhabit simultaneously a subjective and a social world” (Casemore, 2008, p. 126).*

*“It’s about how some of the things that make us Southerners, like ‘the old homeplace’ and ‘old time religion’ and dwelling on ‘the good old days’ can influence how we look at things”* (Whitlock, 2007, p. 11).

*“What has become increasingly clear to me is that, in coming to this country and in adjusting to American schools, immigrant students and their families travel very long distances. These distances are physical, emotional, and psychological. And for many of these individuals, the journey from where they came from to becoming ‘American’ will take a very long time indeed.”* (Valdés, 2001, p. 9)

The South where I grew up always lies just below the surface, a constant comforting presence in every thought and conversation. Yet today there are questions as to what constitutes “Southernness.” Southern geographies (physical forms, identities, discursive markers, institutions, etc.) are being “re-placed,” which raises the question: “Where, and how, do we place contemporary southern geographies” (Winders, 2009, p. 343)?

Perhaps the physical geographic changes are the ones most readily apparent. Towns across the region house similar strip malls with similar merchandise. While the Sand Mountain town I grew up in still does not have a McDonald’s, you only have to go to the next town over instead of off the mountain to find one now. Chain restaurants now fill Southern bellies with standardized, homogeneous food rather than the traditional meals once eaten at the family dinner table. Although it has Southern roots, Wal-Mart reproduces a generic community throughout the region, the nation, and the world. These physical markers force the redefinition of community and home.

Demographic changes are also transforming the South. We can no longer speak of dualities, but rather multiplicities. Our schools are more diverse than at any other point in our region’s history (Frey, 2011). Children of immigrants are one of the fastest-growing demographic groups in the United States (Hernandez, Denton, & Blanchard, 2011). According to the 2010 U.S. Census, the overwhelming majority of growth within the United States’ child population can be attributed to growth within the U.S. Latino/a population as a whole (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). According to Frey (2011), “the states [Texas, Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, Arizona, and Nevada] that gained the most children in the last decade reveal the outsized influence of Hispanics on child growth” (p. 7). The impact of this demographic shift will transform U. S. schools, particularly those in the South, for decades to come.

This growth of Latino/a population in the “New South” or “*el Nuevo Sur*” saw the region welcome more Latino/a immigrants than any other geographic region of the United States from 1990 to the first years of the new millennium (Wainer, 2004). This demographic shift has created the desire for a new, more inclusive conversation, complicated though it may be, about the New South and what it means to be Southern (Griffith, 2008; Jackson, 2011; Marrow, 2011; Mohl, 2003; Odem & Lacey, 2009; Schmid, 2003; Smith & Furusest, 2006; Suárez-Orozco & Paez, 2002; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001; Torres, Popke, & Hapke, 2006; Winders, 2005, 2009, 2011; Winders & Smith, 2012; Yarbrough, 2009).

We are reminded that “place memory is personal *and* collective, subjective *and* social” (Casemore, 2008, p. 28), but what does that mean when “the South’s taken-for-granted legibility is not so clear” (Winders, 2011, p. 349)? What does it mean when the accepted collective narrative of the South is challenged and reconfigured? As Winders (2011) queries, “Can you

become Southern and not know it? Who gets to decide, and how? How long does it take to ‘become’ Southern” (p. 344)? When and how does one transform “from a stranger to a Southerner” (Gleeson, 2000, p. 8)? How can we examine both social and spatial boundaries in order to better understand the “debordering-rebordering” (Spener & Staudt, 1998) that is occurring throughout the region? These are questions that will continue to fuel our ongoing conversations about the South.

At the heart of the issue lies the acknowledgement that the South is changing. From the Old South to the *Nuevo* South, the dichotomous racial relationship of Black and White no longer applies. From Spanish-language radio and television stations to the increased presence of *panaderías* and *quinceañeras*, the South is experiencing a transformation.

### **Border Crossings: Transcending Theoretical and Methodological Boundaries**

*“It’s good like when you’re with your friends. Like you have everything in common, like they know you. They know what you’ve been through, like they know what’s it’s like to leave your country and come here. And then sometimes it’s like bad because other kids tease you and call you wetback and act like you shouldn’t be here, like they’re the only ones who should be here, not you. Just because you speak Spanish doesn’t mean you don’t have papers. Even if you don’t have papers, why can’t you be here? If you want to work or go to school, you should be allowed to come here.”*

~Alejandra, 12 year old Latina immigrant

*“Like I’m invisible...Like I don’t have nothin’ to say.”*

~Roberto, 13 year old Latino immigrant when asked how he feels at school

*“I ain’t even gonna try. Those teachers don’t care what I gotta say anyway.”*

~Angie, 14 year old Latina immigrant

*“I don’t let it bother me. They can think I’m a wetback, I’m not one. They can think I’m dumb, I’m not. I don’t need to go back home ‘cause this is like home to me now. I work hard, my mom works hard, my dad works hard, we want to be here. We work hard to be here. I don’t hurt anybody here.”*

~Itzel, 13 year old Latina immigrant

With the increase of immigrants to Georgia, public schools began experiencing a new demographic shift. Many school districts in the South remain haunted by the legacy of segregated schools, many of which did not integrate until the 1970s (Chemersinsky, 2007). Many of these same school districts are currently struggling to meet the needs of their newest students in the same way they struggled to meet the needs of newly integrated student bodies of the 1960s and 1970s. This demographic change has indelibly altered what teaching and learning means in Southern schools. With increased interest, scholars have begun to look to the South in order to investigate several aspects of these emerging immigrant communities (e.g., Bach, 1993; Bohon, Macpherson, & Atilas, 2005; Bohon, Stamps, & Atilas, 2008; Lebaron, 2012; Hernández-León & Zúñiga, 2000, 2003; Murphy, Blanchard, & Hill, 2001; Rodríguez, 2012;

Smith, 2009; Soni, 2012; Suro & Singer, 2002; Torres, 2000). While much of the research has focused on adult inhabitants, the changing demographics of Southern schools provide a rich source for researching the silenced and counter narratives of Latino/a immigrant students.

Quite simply, the South is changing. The binary relationship between Black and White is shifting. As Nieto (2004) notes, "...although we have never been just a nation of Black and White, this image—for historic and other reasons—is a difficult one to dislodge" (p. 204). Nowhere is this more apparent than the modern South, a dramatically different and diverse Dixie.

This different, diverse Dixie calls for transcending theoretical and methodological boundaries, a transformative conceptualization that focuses on empowerment and collaboration. Cummins' (2001) concept of empowerment focuses on the individual at first, rather than the larger societal group, as he argues that the individual must first become empowered before she is able to empower others. Self-perception plays a large role in the concept of empowerment. If one perceives herself as powerless, then she is. She cannot control how others view her, but she is more than able to control her self-perception. As for its applicability to schools, Cummins (1996) insists that both teachers and students have vitally important information and histories to bring to the transformative critical pedagogy model of empowerment.

One component of Cummins' (1996) empowerment framework centers on what he calls "coercive and collaborative relations of power" (p. 14). According to Cummins (1996), "coercive power relations refer to the exercise of power by a dominant group (or individual or country)" (p. 14). These power relations assume that there is a finite amount of power in the world and that the more power one group has, the less power is left for remaining groups. From the coercive power relations perspective, the dominant group views the subjugated group as being inferior and deserving of their lower societal status. In turn, by rating the subjugated group as lower, the dominant group is automatically elevated to a superior position in relation to the subjugated group.

However, collaborative power relations "operate on the assumption that power is not a fixed pre-determined quality but rather can be *generated* in interpersonal and intergroup relations" (Cummins, 1996, p. 15). It is through this generation of power that an individual has the potential to become empowered and change not only his/her social standing, but the societal standing of his/her group. A key tenet of collaborative power relations is that the power is shared among the collaborative individuals of a group or society. Cummins (1996) deems collaborative power relations to be "*additive* rather than *subtractive*. Power is *created with* others rather than being *imposed on* or *exercised over* others" (p. 15).

Transformative critical pedagogy allows for the exploration of what Anzaldúa (1987) deems "the borderlands," the space that many Latino/a youth in the American South inhabit. For Elenes (2003), the borderlands represent "the discourse of people who live between different worlds. It speaks against dualism, oversimplification, and essentialism. It is a discourse, a language, that explains the social conditions of subjects with hybrid identities" (p. 191). It is this sense of not wholly belonging to either culture that He (2010) references in her work on exile curriculum. For Latino/a immigrant students living in the South, this duality of identity can result in occupying "spaces of nonexistence" (Coutin, 2003).

Transformative critical pedagogy also attempts to move marginalized groups from the sidelines of society (Elenes, 2003) by reconciling the disjointed identities of the marginalized (McLaren, 1997). This is of particular importance as marginalization can lead to paralysis:

Alienated from her mother culture, ‘alien’ in the dominant culture, the woman of color does not feel safe within the inner life of her Self. Petrified, she can’t respond, her face caught between *los intersticios*, the spaces between the different worlds she inhabits. (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 4)

It is the negotiation of these in-between spaces that leads to a type of double consciousness as described by DuBois (1996). Anzaldúa (1987) utilizes the term *dual identity* rather than *double consciousness*, but similarities between Anzaldúa’s *mestizaje* notion and DuBois’ description are striking from different perspectives:

A kind of dual identity—we don’t identify with the Anglo-American cultural values and we don’t totally identify with the Mexican cultural values. We are a synergy of two cultures with various degrees of Mexicanness or Angloness. I have so internalized the borderland conflict that I sometimes feel like one cancels out the other and we are zero, nothing, no one. *A veces no soy nada ni nadie. Pero hasta cuando no lo soy, lo soy.* (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 63)

It is this negotiation of space, of the borderlands, that transformative critical pedagogy addresses as it focuses on “developing a democratic public philosophy that respects the notion of difference as part of a common struggle to extend the quality of public life” (Giroux, 1991, p. 28). It is the pedagogical freedom offered by transformative critical pedagogy that allows educators to move beyond the traditional societal confines of the classroom:

What is being called for here is a notion of border pedagogy that provides educators with the opportunity to rethink the relations between the centers and the margins of power. That is, such a pedagogy must address the issue of racism as one that calls into question not only forms of subordination that create inequities among different groups as they live out their lives, but...also challenges those institutional and ideological boundaries that have historically masked their own relations of power behind complex forms of distinction and privilege. (Giroux, 1991, p. 135)

By rethinking these relationships, educators are better able to “decenter the center” and allow students to value and celebrate their own unique perspective without conforming to assimilationist pressures (Nayaran & Harding, 2000). This understanding of one’s experience is crucial as “all cultural identities presuppose a certain narrative intentionality and are informed by particular stories” (McLaren, 1995a, p. 89).

### ***Voces calladas: Latino/a immigrant voices in Southern schools***

Author: Do you think your teachers care about you?

Estela: *None of ‘em. Nope.*

Author: And why do you think that?

Estela: *I don’t know their feelings, but I know how they act, and they don’t care if I learn or not. They don’t care if I come to school or not. I think they wish I didn’t never come to school.*

~Estela, 13 year old Latina immigrant



*Well, like I think it's easier to not be Mexican. Like people don't pick on you so much. Like people, like the kids in our class think it's cool that you speak Spanish 'cause like you're white and you speak Spanish, but nobody thinks it's cool that I'm a Mexican and I speak English, you know? Like it's just a lot easier if you're from here, like nothing's as hard.*

~Alejandra, 12 year old Latina immigrant

Wainer (2004) asserts that the integration of Latino/a immigrants into American educational institutions, particularly in the South, has been “deeply flawed” (p. 9). This is particularly problematic at a time when the challenge of educating immigrant students, “particularly those of Latino heritage, in U. S. schools has never been greater” (Nieto, 1999, p. ix). This simplistic, binarist, reductionist view excludes many students from society at large, forcing Latino/as to the sidelines and reaffirming a sense of not wholly belonging.

The incongruity of Latino/a students’ lived experiences and the educational environment creates a disconnect that further serves as a tool of domination and assimilation (McLaren, 1994). In actuality, two schools exist within each school building, “one which effectively cultivates its mainstream students, while the other merely warehouses its newcomers (Valdés, 2001, p. 113), with immigrants functioning as “a caste-like minority” (Howe, 1997, p. 74). In many instances, these newcomers perform at a lower level than their native peers because they are served at a lower level (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 1995; Valdés, 2001; Valenzuela, 1999).

While classrooms across the country are becoming more culturally, linguistically, and ethnically diverse, the teaching force in the United States remains overwhelmingly White. National data indicate that 84% of the country’s teaching force is White (Feistritzer, 2011). The latest data available (2010-2011 academic year) from the Georgia Governor’s Office of Student Achievement (2012a) indicate that 73.2% of Georgia’s teachers self-identify as White. Conversely, Latino/a teachers comprise less than two percent of Georgia’s teaching force (Governor’s Office of Student Achievement, 2012a) at a time that Latino/a students comprise 12% of Georgia’s public school enrollment population (Governor’s Office of Student Achievement, 2012b). This is not meant to imply that White teachers cannot be successful working with Latino/a students. In fact, White voices must become a part of the multicultural debate (Horton & Scott, 2004; McLaren, 1995b, 1997; Nieto, 1997). Nieto (1999) suggests that in order to include Whites in the multicultural discussion, we begin by “defining Whites as ‘ethnics’ who have their own histories and identities” (p. xiii). If we fail to do so, “it is too easy to characterize Whites as normal and others as ‘different’ or ‘exotic’” (Nieto, 1999, p. xiii). She argues:

[It is] *particularly* crucial for White teachers to reflect on what it means to be teachers of African American, Latino, Asian, and American Indian students; they need to consider what it means to be *both* White and multicultural and *both* White and anti-racist. (Nieto, 1999, p. xiii)

Such reflection helped me as a White teacher of Latino/a students, allowing me to better understand and meet their needs.

Although this narrative generally focuses on primary and secondary schools, Latino/a student voices are not being silenced in P-12 education alone. Their voices are also being threatened at institutions of higher learning. Several states, mostly located in the South, have implemented laws and/or policies banning undocumented students from at least some institutions of higher learning in their respective states (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2012; Perez, 2009). Georgia, in particular, has recently enacted one of the most stringent policies:

The 35 institutions in the University System of Georgia must verify the ‘lawful presence’ of all students seeking in-state tuition rates. In addition, any institution that has not yet admitted all academically qualified applicants in the two most recent years is not allowed to enroll undocumented students. (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2012, para. 7)

This policy “makes Georgia only the second state [South Carolina was the first] to prohibit the admission of illegal immigrants to public four-year institutions” (Hebel, 2010, para. 3), and “requires colleges to check the legal residency of all applicants and prohibits illegal immigrants from enrolling at any college with a selective admissions process” (Brown, 2010, para. 2). Currently the five institutions of higher learning affected by the policy are Georgia College & State University, the Georgia Institute of Technology, Georgia State University, Georgia Health Sciences University, and the University of Georgia (Brumbach, 2011).

[However], the colleges affected by the ban could change from year to year as their selectivity changes. The admissions policy states that it applies each year to public colleges that, in the two most recent academic years, did not admit all academically qualified applicants. (Hebel, 2010, para. 5)

This is yet another example of how “our current approach to immigration fails to consider how best to incorporate the children of newly arrived immigrants (whether or not they have documentation status) into American society” (Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco, & Todorova, 2008, p. 360).

Although these laws create even more hurdles for academic success, the future for Latino/a students is not entirely grim. The University System of Georgia’s (USG) policy regarding undocumented students has already served to mobilize and invigorate not only those immigrants whose words have been shared in this article, but documented and undocumented immigrants throughout the state. This is a significant development in the quest for Latino/a student rights, especially when I recall the days when I would have no one to teach because a rumored raid by *la migra* forced my students to hide from school. Now, some of my former students (currently in high school) are actively advocating for changes to the USG policy through their participation in the Georgia Undocumented Youth Alliance (Edwards, 2011; Shearer, 2011). Other students are involved in Freedom University, “an underground classroom for illegal immigrants provided by volunteer teachers at an undisclosed location in Athens” (Staples, 2012, para. 3). These students’ grassroots efforts serve as wonderful examples of the possibilities for positive curriculum and social change through the implementation of collaborative power relations.

## Invigorating Possibilities for Positive Change

*“Why are those jobs like not many that you have to go to college for? Like most of the jobs on there [referring to the job inventory interest survey], you just need to graduate high school to get a job like that. Like there’s not a doctor or lawyer or anything like that on that list. Like some people here want to go to college. Like it was in the news that we can go to college even if we don’t have papers but we have to pay like more money or something. Like we can go to college if we want. Like those jobs, like that one, to drive a truck. Do you have to graduate to do that?”*

~Jesús, 11 year old Latino immigrant

*“I hope we stay here long enough for me to graduate from high school.... My mom said that we’re going to try to stay here until I graduate from high school. I really want to graduate from an American high school.”*

~Itzel, 13 year old Latina immigrant

*“Well, like I’ll finish high school. I’ll go to like...I was thinkin’ I wanna go to like Oxford [Oxford of Emory]. Like two of my mom’s sisters went over there to work and they said it’s like really nice. One of the girls I know from UGA she went there for like a little while. Like there you can study really cool stuff. Like if you wanna be a lawyer, you can like go there and you take the classes that get you ready for law school, you know?”*

~Alejandra, 12 year old Latina immigrant

*So how, I wondered, could there be trouble between us? They lived in their world, and we lived in our world. It became gradually clear, as I sat there listening, watching the orange comet of their cigarettes arch across the dark, what the trouble was about. They were sick and tired of living in their world. They wanted to live in our world, too. (Bragg, 1997, p. 59)*

Through the transformation of the South, there are incredible opportunities for positive curricular and social change. Schools must be safe, supportive, and inclusive environments if *all* students are to succeed academically and emotionally. The school demographics in Georgia continue to shift and we must be willing to embrace, rather than resent or tolerate, the diversity we have been gifted with in our classrooms and communities. We must constantly search for avenues that validate *all* of our students’ identities and cultural backgrounds (Conchas, 2001; Rollins & Valdez, 2006; Sanders, 1997).

Southern exceptionalism, mainly through the lens of the Northern Other, is being challenged by new studies focused on migration to the South (Winders, 2005). Race continues to be a defining characteristic in a great deal of Southern research, but rather than being limited to continued discussions of Black-White race relations, the interjection of Latino/a migration into the conversation has allowed Southern research to move beyond its previous binary construct. While the narratives in this article were of Latino/a immigrant students, Southern schools are experiencing yet another demographic shift: the increased enrollment of Latino/a students born in the United States. This will open up further avenues of future research as our schools move

toward a more inclusive existence. As Latino/as continue to challenge the Black-White racial binary, the *Nuevo South* will continue to offer research opportunities as we move toward a new chapter in the South's history.

As teachers, we must continue to reflect on our roles and responsibilities regarding positive curricular and social change for *all* students. As Purpel (1989) warns, "we often are the system, even as we are both its cause and effect" (p. 63). We must teach our students to work within the system to effect the change they desire.

The narratives of our students and ourselves remind us of the power we wield in the classroom. Each day we choose to develop either collaborative or coercive relations of power with our students. In doing so, we must be willing to take responsibility for our outcomes. We must realize that the environment we create can either positively or negatively influence our students' lives. While this is a tremendous responsibility, it is ripe with reward only if we are willing to create classrooms and communities that cultivate positive experiences. It is only then that the New South will truly reflect all of its inhabitants.

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