Spanish-for-native-speaker Matters: Narrowing the Latino Achievement Gap through Spanish Language Instruction

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Abstract

This paper argues that Spanish-for-native-speakers (SNS) instruction at the secondary level can play a key role in narrowing the Latino achievement gap. To this end, SNS curricula and practices should be configured to: 1) support Spanish-English biliteracy, 2) support and facilitate learning across the curriculum, 3) socialize Latino students and parents to the American system of education, and 4) marshal the resources of students' home cultures to advance the educational and social needs of Latino youth. In addition, this paper argues that SNS teachers should become stewards for Latino educational progress within their schools. In this capacity, they must seek out collaborations with their colleagues in other disciplines, particularly ESL teachers, as well as key members of the administration, to bring about a supportive and caring school environment for Latino students and their parents.

The Latino Educational Challenge

If the treatment of Hispanics in our educational institutions is like the seismic indicators of an impending earthquake, a set of indicators that are now sending signals of coming dangers, then how we react to those signals is important. We can ignore these, but the dangers will not go away. We can respond to them minimally, study them some more, and prepare for the worst. Or we can marshal the intellectual resources in ways that will make the inevitable an opportunity from which we can benefit (García, 2001: 259).

With these words, Eugene García lays out one of the most significant challenges facing American educators: narrowing the so-called Latino achievement gap. Issues surrounding this challenge fall into two categories: 1) how to provide Latinos with rigorous academic preparation, and 2) how to meet the social and affective needs of these students. Educators looking to advance these goals have an extensive body of literature to draw from. This literature underscores the importance of addressing the relevant issues across the curriculum rather than strictly within the ESL track, as is more commonly done. In this regard, Troncale (2002, p. 7) writes:

In order for ESL students to become equipped with the skills they need to be successful in all their classes, all teachers who work with ESL students should redefine their responsibilities toward students and their relationships with other teachers.

Troncale's words serve as a starting point for the issue that constitutes the focus of this paper: the role of heritage language instruction in Spanish (henceforth Spanish-for-native-speakers (SNS)) at the secondary level in narrowing the Latino achievement gap. Drawing on these words, three important questions arise in reference to this issue: 1)

What particular responsibilities do SNS teachers have toward Latino English learners (henceforth ELs)¹, and Latino students in general? 2) How can SNS instruction equip these students to succeed in all their classes? 3) How can SNS teachers redefine their relationship with their colleagues in the content areas and with other school personnel so as to meet their responsibilities toward Latino students? These complex questions are best answered by reviewing the overall schooling experience of Latino high school students. The following section undertakes such a review.

The Schooling of Latino High School Students

At 21%, high school dropout rates for Latinos are significantly higher than those of other student populations in this country, in particular Asian/Pacific (4.3%), White (8%) and African-American (12%) (Fry, 2003). Aggregate dropout rates, however, offer a limited view of a complex problem. To fully understand Latino dropout rates, it is valuable to distinguish between different subpopulations of Latino youth. Foreign-born Latinos are more than twice as likely to drop out of high school as their U.S.-born counterparts (34% vs. 15%). Focusing more closely on the foreign born, an important distinction emerges: Latino students who arrived in the U.S. at a young age and have had most of their schooling in this country have dropout rates of 18%, while those who are primarily educated abroad have dropout rates of 90% (Fry, 2003). Naturally, the amount of time Latino youth spend in U.S. schools correlates with how well they speak English, a crucial factor in the Latino dropout equation. Indeed, Latinos who speak English well have dropout rates of 15%, while those who do not have a 60% dropout rate (Fry, 2003). Beyond having oral proficiency in everyday English, research underscores the importance of knowing academic English, a variety of English used by educated speakers in formal situations. Acquiring academic English is critical if students are to be on the path to socioeconomic success. Without it, English learners (ELLs) cannot fully compete in school and professional settings, no matter how conversant they may be in other varieties of English (Scarcella, 2003).

Mastering academic English is a notoriously difficult task requiring many years of instruction, well beyond the years required to acquire oral proficiency. Demonstrating this fact, a study by California Tomorrow indicates that 45 to 70% of all ELs in California high schools are actually orally proficient in English. Although these students are not recently arrived immigrants with limited facility in everyday English (Ruiz-de-Velasco et al., 2000), they lack academic literacy skills. These deficiencies persist into college; for example, Rumberger and Gándara (2000) note that 60% of incoming freshman at the University of California, Irvine failed the 1998 freshman writing exam. Remarkably, more than 90% of these students were language-minority students who had completed eight or more years of instruction in American schools and were fluent in everyday English. Moreover, these students all had academic records that qualified them to enroll in this very selective university. These examples illustrate a distinction introduced by Cummins (1979) between basic interpersonal communicative skills (BICS) and cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP). Cummins and others have argued that BICS are acquired within two years of exposure to a second language, whereas

CALP requires five or more years of exposure (Klesmer, 1994; Cummins, 1981, Cummins, 1984). Notwithstanding this and other research demonstrating the critical importance of academic English and its inherent difficulty, academic English remains a frequently neglected and little understood area of instruction (Scarcella, 2003).

In addition to academic English, content matter instruction with a focus on higher order skills is a key component of academic success. Three institutional barriers have been shown to limit access to such instruction for Latinos and other ELs through tracking, segregation, and departmentalized instruction. Regarding track placement, research indicates that ELs often find themselves following a watered-down course regimen that offers superficial coverage of content matter and underemphasizes higher order critical skills. In addition, tracking frequently deprives ELs of interactions with mainstream students that are critical to their social and linguistic development. (Harklau, 1994, Fillmore, 1992, Valdés, 2000, Gándara et al., 2003). Furthermore, recent research indicates that the detrimental effects of tracking on ELs may even outweigh those related to having limited English skills (Callahan, 2005).

School segregation poses many problems as well. As a general rule, ELs attend highly segregated schools where they interact largely with other students similar to themselves. According to Gándara et al. (2003), this situation compromises the schooling of ELs in four significant ways. First, it severely limits ELs' exposure to linguistic input from native English speakers (see also Fillmore 1991, 1992, and Valdés 2000). Second, it limits ELs' accessibility to important social networks, particularly those involving adults and high performing peers who understand the American system of education. Third, statistically speaking, it means that ELs will likely find themselves attending schools that lack key resources such as textbooks and other learning materials, adequate facilities, etc. Fourth, it means that ELs will also likely be taught by teachers who lack the training and experience to address their needs.²

Departmentalized instruction is known to breed a "not me" attitude among subject area teachers regarding the teaching of literacy skills and higher order skills to ELs (Ruiz-de-Velasco et al., 2000). As a result, most, if not all, of the responsibility for teaching these vital skills generally falls upon ESL teachers. This situation effectively deprives ELs of well-articulated instruction in literacy and other higher order skills across the curriculum, making it difficult for them to transition into mainstream classes (Echeverria and Short, 2003; Ruiz-de-Velasco et al., 2000; Walqui, 2000).³

School practices that undervalue the home culture and language of Latino youth are also a serious concern. According to Valenzuela (1999), "rather than building on students' cultural and linguistic knowledge and heritage to create biculturally and bilingually competent youth, schools subtract these identifications from them to their social and academic detriment" (p. 25).

Luis Rodriguez (1983) poignantly describes the effects of such practices:

I had fallen through the chasm between two languages. The Spanish had been beaten out of me in the early years of school - and I didn't learn English very well either. This was the predicament of many Chicanos. We could almost be called incommunicable ... We needed to obtain victories in language built on an infrastructure of self-worth. But we were defeated from the start (quoted in Walqui, 2000:18).

Elaborating on the importance of students' home culture, Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco (2001) explain that immigrant cultures are the repositories of beliefs and attitudes that are conducive to success - values such as respect of family and authority, deference for education, and optimism about the future. These values provide Latino youth a sense of identity and social connectedness, both of which are crucial to their psychological wellbeing. Along the same lines, Valenzuela and Dornbusch (1994) note that families, and in a larger sense, the notion of families, are a source of dense social networks for Latino youth providing social, emotional, and academic support.

Various social factors also contribute to the Latino educational gap, including a lack of familiarity on the part of Latino youth and parents with many aspects of the American educational system, a lack of involvement on the part of Latino parents with their children's schooling, and a lack of bonding between Latino students and school personnel (Walqui, 2000; Ruiz-de-Velasco et al., 2000). In reference to this last point, Ruiz-de-Velasco et al. (2000) observe that administrators, counselors, and other school personnel who function as gatekeepers to key school resources often lack the language skills and cultural knowledge to work effectively, let alone bond, with Latino students. This situation militates against the academic progress of Latinos and further contributes to their sense of social isolation within the school.⁴

In contrast, schools with counselors and staff members who know how to connect with ELs are more successful at educating these students (Walqui, 2000; García, 2001). Successful academic programs for ELs also place a high value on home languages and cultures, have high expectations for these students, make their academic success an all-around school priority; and strongly encourage and facilitate the participation of ELs' parents in school functions (Walqui, 2000:79).

Though by no means exhaustive, the above discussion summarizes the most germane factors to the issue at hand, namely, the place of SNS courses in narrowing the Latino achievement gap. Moving this discussion further along, the next section offers an overview of the field of SNS.

What is SNS?

In her seminal paper, Guadalupe Valdés (1975) put forth the idea that bilingual Latinos studying Spanish have distinct needs from those of Anglophone students. Since then, much effort has been directed at gaining a precise understanding of the needs and abilities of these students and designing appropriate pedagogical methods and materials.

With regard to language, Valdés (1997) proposes four instructional goals for SNS. These are: 1) Spanish language maintenance, 2) acquisition of a prestige variety (of Spanish), 3) expansion of students' bilingual range (i.e. expansion of a variety of competencies in Spanish, including grammatical, textual, and pragmatic competence) and 4) transfer of literacy skills from one language to the other.

Focusing on linguistic as well as non-linguistic factors, Web and Miller (2000, p. 83) propose a variety of goals for both SNS students and teachers. Goals for students include: learning about the customs, beliefs, contributions, and history of their country of origin; developing increased self-monitoring abilities; developing the ability to communicate effectively in a variety of contexts and for a variety of purposes; becoming aware of the usefulness of their heritage language and their reasons for studying it; and becoming independent learners. Goals for teachers include: having high standards and expectations for students; being sensitive to students' cultural backgrounds and incorporating those cultures into their teaching; encouraging students to explore the richness of their linguistic and cultural heritage; and functioning as advocates for SNS students within the larger school setting.

The American Association of Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese (AATSP) has its own set of recommendations, several of which overlap with Valdés' goals (1997) and Web and Miller (2000). Areas of instructional significance identified in these recommendations include student motivation and self-esteem; linguistic issues such as language formality, regional and social diversity, and improving accuracy in spelling; pedagogical issues including how to deal with student errors; strategies for language expansion; and increasing awareness of metalinguistic skills and cultural diversity (AATSP, 2000).

From the above, it is clear that the goals of SNS instruction are consonant with the objective of narrowing the Latino achievement gap. It is also clear that SNS teachers are particularly well suited to advancing this objective. For one, by virtue of their subject matter, they are in a position to reinforce literacy skills, instill cultural pride, and invite reflection on cultural differences between the U.S. and the Spanish-speaking world. For another, they are uniquely qualified to relate to Latinos students and parents in culturally appropriate ways, by virtue of their linguistic skills and academic background.⁵ Surprisingly, however, the SNS research literature rarely, if ever, makes explicit mention of the Latino achievement gap, let alone explores ways to address this problem. In large part, this situation is the result of the way the SNS field is perceived, which is as a sub-discipline of the larger field of Spanish as a foreign language. Accordingly, SNS practitioners typically see their principal role as working to advance the goals of Spanish language departments. This usually means getting students to levels of proficiency in Spanish that will enable them to read literary texts and write about them. Crucially, similar to most subject area specialists, SNS teachers do not generally see their work as encompassing the more general academic wellbeing of Latino students.

While understandable, this situation leads to a significant opportunity cost where the Latino achievement gap is concerned. The next section examines this opportunity cost in the context of answering the first of the three questions posed at the beginning of this paper: What responsibilities do SNS teachers have towards Latino ELs and toward all Latino students in general?

SNS Teachers' Responsibilities

As discussed, the field of SNS is particularly well suited to addressing many of the factors that hold back Latinos in American schools. But does this necessary mean that SNS teachers should pursue this course of action? After all, why should SNS teachers, overworked and with their own discipline-specific challenges, get involved in as intricate an issue as the Latino achievement gap?

A key reason is because the Latino achievement gap has potentially serious and far-reaching consequences for American society. As economist Thomas Bailey notes "in the past, educational inequality was a problem primarily for those individuals who ended up with low levels of education; increasingly it will be a problem for everyone" (2005:2). A study by the Pew Hispanic Center serves to quantify the full magnitude of this problem:

Latinos' success at entering and graduating from college affects not only their wellbeing but also the nation's wellbeing. Between 2000 and 2025 the white working age population will decline by five million as baby boomers retire from the labor force. Working age Latinos are projected to increase by 18 million. Thus, the vitality of the U.S. work force increasingly depends on Hispanic educational progress (Pew Hispanic Center, 2002: 1).

A second reason that SNS teachers should be involved in narrowing the Latino achievement gap is that the growth and development of SNS as a field may well depend on how well it succeeds at advancing the academic and social wellbeing of Latinos. This is a particularly important consideration in light of current trends in education under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) and high stakes testing. In a paper titled "Can Spanish Survive *No Child Left Behind*?", MacGregor-Mendoza observes that many schools are seeking to eliminate Spanish courses for Latinos based on the perception that the Spanish language represents the principle obstacle to the academic success of these students. In the same manner, Alamillo et al. (2004: 217) document the effects of the ongoing erosion of programs that support native language instruction in California schools. They note:

...not only are students no longer able to rely on their primary language to help them make sense of material, but due to testing pressures, teachers are no longer able to offer them a rich curriculum, even in English. These teachers felt they were further impoverishing the educational experience of their language-minority students because they, too, had been denied the use of their linguistic talents and training to help their students make sense of the material.

In sum, SNS teachers should care deeply about narrowing the Latino achievement gap, not just for the sake of their students, but also for the sake of their own field and of American society in general. Of course, all teachers and school personnel have a responsibility to help Latino youth succeed in school. However, in a sense, SNS teachers have a higher responsibility - a duty - by virtue of the opportunities afforded by their subject area and the linguistic and cultural skills that they bring to the task. The next section addresses the second of the questions: How can SNS equip Latino ELs, and Latino students in general, to succeed in their classes?

Equipping Latino Students for Success

As previously noted, to succeed in school, Latino students must a) have access to a rigorous academic preparation in the content areas and academic English; b) be socialized to the ways of American education; and c) capitalize on their cultural and linguistic heritage. In this section, I focus on how SNS can support the development of each of these components of success.

Before proceeding with this discussion, two caveats are in order. First, it should be noted that adopting the activities and practices put forth in this section do not entail abandoning the traditional topics of the SNS curriculum, i.e. culture, literature, and grammar. Rather, the idea is to augment the traditional curriculum with material that supports the overall academic success of Latino students. Although upon initial consideration this proposal may seem independent from the goals of SNS, closer analysis reveals it to be fully in line with several such goals, in particular, those involving expanding the bilingual range, transferring literacy skills, fostering linguistic awareness, and promoting learner independence.

Second, for the most part, the activities that follow can and should be accomplished in Spanish as a way to expand students' range. However, students should also be allowed to tap into English in cases where it proves necessary in meeting the larger learning objectives. Indeed, Mirón and Inda (2004) contend that many immigrant children in the U.S. inhabit transnational spaces where being able to go back and forth between two languages - i.e. their home language and English - is essential the exigencies of every day life. For this reason, students should be encouraged, and indeed taught, to tap into both of their languages. All too often, however, SNS students are chastised for using English. Underlying this practice is a nationalist linguistic esthetic, which Valdés et al. (2003, p. 8) describe as follows:

Much attention is given in many foreign language departments to protecting the language from contamination from the English that surrounds them and to providing a model of a standard target language free of vulgar colloquialisms and popular jargon.

Interestingly, a similar situation exists in mainstream English departments, where immigrant students are criticized for using a contact variety of English (Valdés, 1999). This state of affairs does not serve Latino students well. For one, it does not prepare them to function effectively in the transnational spaces that they inhabit. For another, it sends the message to these students that their linguistic repertoire is fundamentally flawed.⁶

a) Rigorous Academic Preparation

A common assumption made by SNS teachers is that competence in English is not a problem for SNS students, or at least not a problem that warrants the attention of the SNS curriculum. Accordingly, topics such as false cognates and orthography are often discussed in SNS classes with the goal of clearing up problems in Spanish. Rarely, if ever, does instruction focus on addressing problems in English or supporting the simultaneous development of English and Spanish. This situation deprives Latino ELs of much needed instruction in academic English. In addition, it sends the message that Spanish-language learning has no bearing on what happens in the larger school setting.

My first awareness of this problem came about in the context of teaching connectors (e.g., words such as *consecuentemente* 'consequently', *no obstante* 'notwithstanding', etc.) to my SNS students at California State University, Long Beach. Assuming that these students knew English connectors well, my initial attempts at teaching this material involved handing them a list of Spanish connectors with their English equivalents. This approach proved to be ineffective because, contrary to what I had assumed, my students actually had a very limited command of English connectors. I have since discovered other gaps in these students' knowledge, most notably, a lack of familiarity with general reading, writing, and language-learning strategies. As a result, my approach to teaching SNS now involves reviewing the general concepts behind an instructional topic and teaching the corresponding Spanish and English vocabulary in tandem. I also encourage my students to bring up questions or observations regarding their writing in other courses, whether in English or Spanish. This approach exemplifies one of the most important ways in which SNS courses can contribute to the success of Latino students, namely, by supporting the development of biliteracy, i.e. bilingual literacy (Hornberger, 1990; Chevalier, 2004).

Another way in which SNS instruction can further Latino students' education is by supporting learning of the core content areas and of higher order skills. The research literature suggests four ways to accomplish these goals. One such approach, exemplified in Gutierrez (2002), involves using peer group interactions in Spanish to facilitate content area learning. In particular, the exemplary math teachers described in this study encouraged their Latino students to use Spanish when working in groups when they found it be useful. Remarkably, Gutierrez notes "...at times when students spoke exclusively in Spanish, the teachers relinquished their authority and trusted the students, as they had no way of knowing exactly what the students were talking about (Gutierrez, 2002, p.1075)." The teachers also made effective use of grouping strategies to ensure that Spanish-dominant students worked with bilingual students and monolingual English

speakers and that all students, regardless of their linguistic background, had something of value to contribute to the group. In addition, these teachers placed instructional emphasis on the language of mathematics, using a variety of mediating strategies, such as paraphrasing and elaborating, to make the language of their textbooks more accessible to EL students.

These teachers' instructional techniques are known to support the development of the three main components of academic literacy: 1) knowledge of the concepts of a topic of study, 2) proficiency in the language associated with this topic, and 3) mastery of the tasks that facilitate the learning of the topic (Short, 1998; Echeverria & Short, 2003). The third of these components falls under the domain of CALP instruction, which teaches students the academic skills to become effective independent learners (Kinsela, 1997).

Drawing on this line of research, one way in which SNS instruction can support the development of biliteracy and the content areas is for teachers to set aside class time for group work aimed at exploring a concept or accomplishing a task from another area of the high school curriculum. The goal behind this proposal is to empower Latino students by creating "sub-cultures of expertise" and communities of learners (Brown and Campione, 1993). By way of illustration, let us suppose that a few students express an interest in discussing a challenging concept from geometry class. As homework, they can prepare themselves for this activity by a) making sure that they can articulate the precise nature of the difficulty they are having, b) selecting a problem to bring to class that exemplifies this difficulty, and c) reviewing the subject-specific vocabulary that they will need to discuss this material in Spanish. In-class group work can then focus on applying problem-solving skills to find a solution, or where no solution can be found, devising a plan of action that will yield the desired results (i.e. requesting further clarification from the math instructor, consulting other materials, etc.).

This activity combines three instructional frameworks that are known to support learner independence: content-based instruction, cooperative learning, and CALP instruction (Troncale, 2002). To maximize learner independence, students and teachers should assume complementary roles: students taking ownership of their learning and SNS teachers relinquishing some ownership of their class. Of course, SNS teachers must also facilitate collaborative learning by providing task infrastructure and making effective use of mediating and grouping strategies (Galagher, Kraut, & Egido, 1990).

A second approach to making Spanish-language instruction responsive to the overall academic interests of Latino ELs is exemplified in Walqui (2000). This study of exemplary school programs for ELs describes a high school in Calexico, California that allows students who are not fully proficient in English to present their senior project in Spanish or in a combination of English and Spanish. To help students with this and other assignments, the program has an extensive library of books and other Spanish-language resources. Another school described in this study has organized the curriculum along thematic units, with Spanish language instruction contributing to these units. In keeping

with this line of work, SNS instructors can engage students in Spanish-language activities that build upon work in other areas of the curriculum. (Sample activities of this type are provided in the Appendix). These activities can be adapted to meet the needs of students at different levels of instruction. For those struggling with their coursework, they can serve to review and organize the basic concepts, language, and tasks from different areas of the high school curriculum. For more advanced students, these activities provide a way to revisit school topics at a more challenging level. In this capacity, SNS courses can effectively function as an honors track for gifted Latinos who lack the linguistic skills to do this kind of work in English.

It is important to point out that SNS teachers do not need to be experts in the content areas, nor do they need to get involved in teaching within these areas to engage students in this type of work; rather, they can rely on their students and colleagues in other disciplines for expertise and guidance. I have already touched upon how collaborative learning can build sub-cultures of expertise among students. Studies of exemplary programs also point to a number of initiatives that promote collegial collaboration, including school-based planning and action teams and collegial circles. A discussion of these options appears in the final section of this paper. Turning to the third approach, research indicates that after-school programs or an arrangement of the school schedule that extends the amount of time spent on schoolwork can play a key role in the success of minority students (Ruiz-de-Velasco et al., 2000; Gándara et al., 2003, García, 2001). Underscoring the importance of this approach, Callahan (2005, p. 324) notes:

To provide effective instruction to English learners, educators will need to revisit allotments of time and course-taking patterns in an effort to integrate higher levels of language alongside academic content. Focusing on the quality of classroom instruction will shift the discourse away from limited language proficiency back to academic content.

In line with this focus, tutoring programs and homework clubs run by SNS students and moderated by SNS teachers present an effective way to help Latino ELs who are struggling with their schoolwork. Research indicates that these types of programs also offer significant benefits to students participating as tutors and organizers. For example, SNS students in a California school district who tutored Anglophone students in Spanish became more active in after school activities, raised their grades, improved their self-esteem, and enhanced their standing among school personnel (Quintanar-Sarellana, Huebner, & Jensen, 1997). Furthermore, though not mentioned by the authors, the tutors' interaction with English-speaking students quite likely improved their English acquisition.

A more ambitious effort in the after-school category might be to organize an academic decathlon where Latino students from different schools compete against each other in Spanish on a variety of school topics. Along the same lines, writing contests and science and math fairs in Spanish offer Latinos with limited English proficiency the opportunity

to hone their academic skills and showcase their talents. Activities of this genre constitute powerful horizon expanding experiences, i.e. experiences that expose students to the world beyond their immediate confines (Sikkink and Hernández, 2002). Such experiences are crucial because they provide incentives and pathways for self-improvement that are not always available in segregated schools, such as those often attended by Latino students.

A final approach to helping Latino ELs is suggested by the ongoing debate surrounding the GED test in Spanish. Detractors contend that the availability of this test in Spanish provides incentives for schools to relegate Latino ELs to a GED track rather than working to improve overall education for these students. On the other hand, proponents argue that this test may be the only viable route to a high school diploma for some students (Zehr, 2006). The present discussion offers another way to conceive of GED preparation courses in Spanish, namely, as supporting learning in the content areas for low-proficiency Latino ELs who are pursuing a regular high school diploma. Put differently, the GEP preparation curriculum can serve to shore up regular instruction for at-risk Latinos, as opposed to serving to circumvent it. Content-based SNS courses designed around the GED preparation curriculum present a promising way to accomplish this goal. To this end, test-preparation manuals (widely available in Spanish) can become an excellent textbook for intermediate and advanced SNS classes, as well as for independent studies.⁷ These materials provide a rich source of authentic linguistic input covering a wide gamut of vocabulary in the language arts, social sciences, sciences, and mathematics.

To fully appreciate the value of this approach, it is important to consider what ELs in secondary schools actually study. Below are the learning programs for two Latino ELs in their sophomore year in high school in a California school district (reproduced from Gándara et al., 2003, p. 29).

Period	Program 1	Program 2
1	No class	No class
2	Language Development 1	Language Development 1
3	Language Development 2	Language Development 2
4	Native Spanish 1	General Math (in English)
5	U.S. History (in Spanish)	Native Spanish 1
6	Math A (general, low level)	Drawing 1
7	Weightlifting	No class

Conspicuously weak both in content area instruction and college-preparatory courses, these programs attest to the great need for content-based SNS courses, and more specifically, for SNS courses that follow the GED preparation curriculum. These programs also make it abundantly clear that such courses do not have to be added at the expense of "regular" SNS courses (referred to above as "Native Spanish"). Rather, they can fit into a free period, thereby making SNS a two-period area of study, as is often done with ESL (i.e. "Language Development"). In all, the practices discussed in this section

provide partial solutions to some of the problems outlined in our discussion of the Latino achievement gap, particularly the need to offer rigorous preparation in the content areas, academic English, and the higher order skills.

b) Socializing Latino Students to the American System of Education

Research indicates that Latino students' lack of familiarity with the American system of education undercuts their academic success. For example, Latino students overwhelmingly believe that it is very important to attend college. However, their inability to negotiate the steps leading to this goal significantly limits their participation in college. Underscoring this point, Gándara et al. (2003) note, "We have been surprised by the extent to which many low and English learner students do not know, for example, the relationship between taking higher math and increasing postsecondary opportunity" (p. 39). Likewise, in a recent survey of Latinos, 75% of high school graduates who chose not to pursue a college education indicated they would have been more likely to enroll in college if they had had more information about financial aid (Fry, 2003).

As Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco (2001) point out, lack of parental knowledge of these matters is a serious limiting factor in Latinos' participation in college:

In order to gain access to better educational opportunities for their children, parents must learn the new rules of engagement in a very complex, high stakes game. They need to know things that middle-class college-educated parents take for granted: the difference between college-track and non-college-track courses, preparing for the PSAT and SAT, differences in opportunities afforded by attending different colleges (junior colleges, four-year colleges, and universities), how to write a college application essay, and how to access financial aid (p.151).

The SNS classroom offers unique opportunities for socializing Latino students and their parents to the rules of engagement of American schools. One such opportunity, for example, can take the form of a bilingual brochure designed by SNS students for Latino students and their parents with important information about college, e.g. how to prepare for it, how to apply to it, how to finance it, etc. As background for this assignment, SNS students can identify cultural and other background factors that prevent Latino students from attending college. On the basis of this information, they can design a brochure that is responsive to the needs of this population. This activity serves to equip Latino students and parents with critical information about the American school system. It serves other purposes as well. Notably, it invites reflection on students' home traditions and beliefs and teaches students about notions of audience and purpose in writing.

Question-answer bulletin boards can also be a valuable source of information on American schools and society. Using this forum, students and parents can post and respond to questions such as where to obtain financial information about college or how to contact Latino college students who may be willing to share their experiences and offer guidance. Indeed, Latino college students are a valuable resource and should be tapped as

guest speakers at SNS classes or special informational events for parents. In all, SNS courses offer many opportunities for socializing Latino students and their parents to the American system of education. Crucially, by following this plan of action, educators can use SNS courses to empower students. The SNS classroom offers unique opportunities for socializing Latino students and their parents to the rules of engagement of American schools. One such opportunity, for example, can take the form of a bilingual brochure designed by SNS students for Latino students and their parents with important information about college, e.g. how to prepare for it, how to apply to it, how to finance it, etc. As background for this assignment, SNS students can identify cultural and other background factors that prevent Latino students from attending college. On the basis of this information, they can design a brochure that is responsive to the particular needs of this population.⁸ This activity serves to equip Latino students and parents with critical information about the American school system. It serves other purposes as well. Notably, it invites reflection on students' home traditions and beliefs and teaches students about notions of audience and purpose in writing. Question-answer bulletin boards can also be a valuable source of information on American schools and society. Using this forum, students and parents can post and respond to questions such as where to obtain financial information about college or how to contact Latino college students who may be willing to share their experiences and offer guidance. Indeed, Latino college students are a valuable resource and should be tapped as guest speakers at SNS classes or special informational events for parents.

In all, SNS courses offer many opportunities for socializing Latino students and their parents to the American system of education. Crucially, by following this plan of action, educators can use SNS courses to empower students.

c) Building on Latino students' Cultural and Linguistic Heritage

Concerning academic and social issues, Latino parents often leave their children to fend for themselves. Researchers hypothesize that this may be because as their children become better educated and acculturated into the American system, parents may feel less qualified to offer advice on these matters (Sikkink & Hernández, 2002). Often, this situation leads to the erosion of parental authority and the inversion of parent-child roles (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001). One place where Latino parents can assert their parental authority and serve as purveyors of cultural information for their children is in the SNS classroom. Indeed, Latino parents are a crucial component of an SNS curriculum that aims to connect students to their home cultures and to invite reflection on issues of critical importance to Latino youth.

As previously noted, Latino youths' home cultures play a key role in helping Latino youth retain a sense of identity and connectedness. In addition, a growing body of literature indicates that home cultures are critical to the academic and even physical well being of immigrant students. In the area of academics, for example, Montero-Sieburth and Barth (2001) report that immigrant students who remain closely connected to their home cultures are more likely to achieve academic success. With regard to physical wellbeing,

a National Research Council study indicates that as immigrant students become more Americanized they are more likely to engage in substance abuse, unprotected sex and other risky behaviors (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001).

Thus, what happens in the SNS classroom in terms of connecting students to the traditions of their home culture has a direct bearing on the overall well-being of Latino students. Because parental participation is key in this regard, SNS should seek out ways to involve Latino parents in the SNS classroom. Activities along this line include: having students and parents write letters to each other explaining their life goals, fears or uncertainties, and expectations for each other; engaging students and their parents in problem-based learning tasks, using question and answer boards to examine cultural issues that Latino students are known to struggle with, i.e. male-female roles, dating customs, the role of religion, etc.

In all, what emerges from this discussion is that SNS instruction can equip Latino youth to negotiate a balance between their two cultures - in effect, between learning instrumental aspects of American culture and retaining key values of Latino cultures. As Portes (1996) envisions it, this is a viable path to success for new immigrants:

The question today is to what sector of American society will a particular immigrant group assimilate? Instead of a relatively uniform 'mainstream' whose mores and prejudices dictate a common path of integration, we observe today several distinct forms of adaptation. One of them replicates the time-honored portrayal of growing acculturation and parallel integration into the white middle class. A second leads straight in the opposite direction to permanent poverty and assimilation to the underclass. *Still a third associates rapid economic advancement with deliberate preservation of the immigrant community's values and tight solidarity* [italics added] (pp. 72-73).

The next section examines the last of the three questions posed earlier: How can SNS teachers redefine their relationship with their colleagues in other content areas and other school personnel to meet their responsibilities toward Latino students?

The Role of SNS Teachers in the Larger School Environment

In schools across the country, there is a critical need for programs that 1) help teachers from all disciplines and administrators understand the needs of Latino students and 2) create a caring school environment for Latino students and their parents. In reference to the first point, Gándara et al. (2003) observe that most professional development programs for teachers offer little or no guidance on the special needs of ELLs. Remarkably, this is even true of development programs for teachers who work primarily with these students. In fact, only 2.5 percent of this nation's teachers working with ELLs have any special preparation on the needs of these students (Ruiz-de-Velasco et al., 2000).

In reference to the second point, Valenzuela (1999) writes:

What does it mean 'to care'? The answer to this question is provided by the students themselves. Teachers and other school personnel are to depart from their penchant for aesthetic caring and embrace a more authentically caring ideology and practice. According to this reformulation, school functionaries are to embark on a search for connection where trusting relationships constitute the cornerstone for all learning (p. 263).

SNS teachers are ideally suited to probe Latino students about what it means to care and to lead school wide initiatives premised on an authentic ideology of caring. School-based planning and action teams such as described in Ruiz-de-Velasco et al. (2000) are representative of one such initiative. Comprising ESL teachers, content area teachers, administrators, counselors, and university partners, these teams focused on identifying the needs of the school's LEP students and devising a plan of action.

Collegial study circles, akin to reading clubs for teachers, provide a forum to discuss the research literature on ELs and reflect on teaching practices (Dodge, 2005). They also provide opportunities for teachers from different disciplines to collaborate on instructional projects that integrate learning across the curriculum.

School practices that create "fields of opportunity" for Latino students are also known to contribute to a supportive school environment (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001). Schools can create fields of opportunity by posting signs in Spanish that greet visitors to the school, displaying the achievements (e.g., college acceptance letters, professional achievements, etc.) of current and past students in school hallways and newsletters, inviting successful Latinos to address students, and offering pre-college transition support (Gibson et al., 2004; Gibson, 2003). Many of the activities presented in this paper also lend themselves to this end. For example, the informational brochures about college, the question and answer boards, and the weekly summaries created in SNS class (see Appendix) can all be displayed in school hallways so that other students can benefit from the information they provide. Other products from SNS class such as compositions, short stories, etc. can also be featured as a way to highlight the achievements of Latino students.

To spearhead school-wide initiatives such as these, SNS teachers must redefine themselves as more than Spanish-language specialists. In effect they must become stewards for Latino educational progress within their schools. As noted earlier, much of the responsibility for what happens to ELs falls on ESL teachers. Kinsella (1997) argues that this situation is unfair ESL teachers. It also does not serve ELs well, for various reasons noted in this paper. Clearly, SNS teachers must share in this responsibility and they must be catalysts for other teachers to follow suit.

This proposal has far-reaching implications for teacher training programs in Spanish, the most significant of which involve educating prospective teachers on issues surrounding the Latino achievement gap and linguistic ideology, as well as training them to employ

instructional practices that support biliteracy such as those used by ESL teachers and bilingual teachers. This proposal has far-reaching implications as well for the field of Spanish language teaching in the U.S. In particular, deeply entrenched ideologies relating to the departmentalization of instruction and nationalist linguistic esthetics will need to be reexamined in light of current social realities and advances in sociolinguistic and pedagogical research.

Summary and Conclusions

In the afterword to his semi autobiographical novel, "Cajas de Cartón", Francisco Jimenez expresses his appreciation to his English teacher, Mr. Lema. He notes:

Aunque yo no hablaba bien el inglés, y el señor Lema no hablaba español, nosotros nos la arreglábamos para comunicarnos mutuamente. El valoraba mi ascendencia cultural mexicana y mi lengua nativa mientras que me enseñaba el inglés. A veces aquello resultaba frustrante para ambos, pero él nunca perdía la paciencia conmigo. El jamás me hizo sentir inepto o inferior por motivo de mis escasos conocimientos del idioma inglés (p. 122). 'Although I didn't know much English and Mr. Lema didn't speak Spanish, we managed to understand each other. He valued my Mexican cultural background and my native tongue while he taught me English. Sometimes, it was all very frustrating for both of us, but he never lost his patience with me. He never made me feel incompetent or inferior because of my limited knowledge of English.'

Jimenez's words are a testament to the power of caring and respectful teachers. However, as an SNS teacher, I can't help but wonder: what if Mr. Lema had actually spoken Spanish? What else could he have done for Jimenez? The child of poor migrant workers, Jimenez overcame great odds to excel in school and in his professional life. But what about the countless Latino students for whom the academic, linguistic, and social challenges of schooling seem insurmountable? What could caring and respectful teachers who speak Spanish do for these students? How could SNS help these students beat the odds? This paper has argued that SNS teachers and courses can be purveyors of the ingredients of academic success. In particular, they can support and facilitate learning across the curriculum, foster the development of biliteracy and biculturalism, help Latino students and their parents navigate the American system of education, instill cultural pride in Latino students, and help Latino students feel connected to their school. In fulfilling these functions, SNS teachers and classes can play a crucial role in narrowing the Latino achievement gap. In this way, the field of SNS can become a catalyst for important change in American schools. By way of conclusion, I return to the three questions posed at the beginning of this paper:

1) What particular responsibilities, if any, do SNS teachers have toward Latino students?

All teachers and school personnel have a responsibility to work toward Latino educational progress. However, in a sense, SNS teachers have a higher responsibility by virtue of the opportunities afforded by their subject area and the linguistic and cultural skills that they bring to the task. Like all responsibilities, this one has its share of burdens.

Fulfilling it will require a reconfiguration of SNS teaching practices and curricula as well as a reconceptualization of the role of SNS teachers. However, the consequences of the Latino achievement gap are such that these burdens cannot be allowed to interfere with the pursuit of Latino educational progress in SNS classes.

2) How can SNS instruction equip Latino ELs, and Latino students in general, to succeed in the larger school context?

SNS courses can marshal their resources to meet the needs of Latino students along four dimensions. First, it can support the development of Spanish-English biliteracy. Second, it can support learning in the content areas. Third, it can help socialize Latino students to the American system of education. And fourth, it can help students capitalize on the resources of their home cultures.

3) How can SNS teachers redefine their relationship with their colleagues in other content areas to advance the larger academic and social interests of Latino students?

SNS teachers must extend their domain of responsibility beyond the confines of their classrooms. In effect, they must become stewards for Latino educational progress within their schools. In this capacity, they must seek out collaborations with their colleagues in other disciplines and key members of the administration to bring about a supportive and caring school environment for Latino students and their parents.

Notes

1. Following standard practice, I will use the term EL (English learner) to refer to students for whom English is not the primary language.
2. Indeed, almost one third of California high school students attend schools with fewer than three EL teachers per 100 students (see Gándara et al., 2003).
3. Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco (2001) point out that guidance counselors are often poorly trained to deal with immigrant issues and may equate low proficiency in English with low aptitude for college.
4. Latino youth are less likely to take college preparatory courses in Science, Mathematics, and English than are White, Black, and Asian students. However, they are as likely as Whites and more likely than Blacks to take college preparatory courses in a Foreign Language. (Llagas, 2003).
5. For the importance of culture-specific notions of *confianza* (trust), *respeto* (respect), and *cariño* (caring) for Latino students and their families see Monzo and Rueda, 2003; Valdés, 1996; and Valenzuela, 1999.

6. According to Beltz (2002), foreign language teachers tend to interpret the use of English by students as symptomatic of a lack of linguistic ability. This is true even when the switch to English signals deep metalinguistic understanding or serves to move a task further along. In the same vein, Pomerantz (2001) argues that students who use English in foreign classrooms risk losing their status as "good language learners.

7. Many advanced native speakers often run out of Spanish courses to take before their senior year of high school. Independent studies in Spanish make it possible for these students to continue to develop their Spanish language skills.

8. The California State University publishes a Spanish-language brochure with this type of information. However, this brochure is a direct translation of their English-language brochure for mainstream students. As such, it does not present the relevant issues from culture-specific perspective of Latino students and parents. For example, this brochure does not address the pros and cons of living on campus versus living at home and issues pertaining to the legal status of students (see The California State University, n.d.).

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Appendix

The following activities (adapted from Dodge 2005) can be used in SNS classes to review and build upon the work done in other classes. In addition, they serve to practice literacy skills and to connect the study of Spanish to the general curriculum. Though shown in English, these activities are intended to be done in Spanish.

The Dialectal Journal

In this column record...	In this column ...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a passage • a phrase • a quote • a key fact • an idea 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • write a reaction • discuss its significance • make a connection • make a comparison • evaluate

The “Aha!” Moment of the Week

Students use the following template to jot down a recent “aha” moment they had in a class. They share their experiences in a group.

Class:
Topic/question:
Answer:
What lead up to the “aha” moment”:

The Exit Card

Exit cards are a good way to review basic literacy skills. The teacher poses a question or problem at the beginning of class. During the last five minutes of class, students write their answers in an index card, which they turn in as they leave class.

Examples of Exit Cards

List 10 Spanish cognates heard in class today and write their English equivalents.	Agree or disagree with something you learned in class today.
Write three facts you learned and three opinions you heard in today’s class.	Write a quiz question to go with today’s lesson.

The Re-write

Re-writes can serve to review information from the content areas and make connections to Spanish. Students work in groups to re-write a passage or piece of writing from another field of study according to different specifications.

Examples of re-writes:

1) Re-write the following in Spanglish and add a line:

Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed, to me:
I lift my lamp beside the golden door.

2) “My very educated mother just served us nine pizzas” is a mnemonic device to remember the order of the planets. Write a mnemonic device in Spanish for the same purpose.