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# Winds of Change: Mexico in a Town in Appalachia

by

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## (ABSTRACT)

This qualitative study examined the changes that have occurred due to global and hemispheric market forces, and particularly through Hispanic immigration, in a small town in Southwest Virginia. The interdisciplinary study is written as a narrative, and includes descriptions of the town and people of Galax, Virginia and of the predominately Mexican immigrants who have come to live there. It examines the interaction between individuals from both groups of people, including worker conflicts in places of employment, and the clash of symbols in shared living environments, such as trailer parks. The primary focus is on the changes and challenges that occur in schools from the perspective of teachers and administrators, as well as from the students. Local residents and Hispanic immigrants alike share their perspectives on the impacts of immigration and their efforts to accommodate changes in their lives and communities. The researcher draws from his personal experience as an immigrant to Mexico to probe the search for identity and meaning that are common to immigrants. The study found that Hispanic children have devised an unofficial dual-language peer support system for learning in the classrooms that circumvents the assimilationist approach to which the schools have adhered. Immigrant children experience marginalization even in caring school environments such as those found in the Galax schools, due largely to the lack of preparation of teachers and administrators in culturally appropriate pedagogy. The study calls for more direct involvement between the university and local communities experiencing significant change due to global forces. Demographic change through immigration impacts schools implicitly, and requires the support and education of teachers and administrators through regional schools of education.

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## CHAPTER ONE—INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

Some small towns and communities in the southern Appalachia are experiencing significant change due to immigration. Hispanic immigrants, mostly from Mexico or Central America, and in considerable numbers have moved into areas of the South that are not traditional destinations for Hispanic immigration. These small towns and communities have neither the infrastructure nor the familiarity with Hispanic culture and language to favor an uncomplicated adaptation to their new realities. This interdisciplinary study examines the experiences and perspectives of two distinct communities who interact as a result of immigration in a small community in Southern Appalachia. The research examines the lived experiences of primarily Mexican immigrants and indigenous residents of the town of Galax, Virginia—a town that has experienced significant demographic change in less than a decade.

The purpose of this case study is to describe the perspectives of the changes both communities experience as they adapt to and learn from each other even as both experience change in place. The research is focused primarily on the schools, but also includes other places of encounter such as churches, places of employment, local markets and in some cases, the homes of participants. Educators, students, parents, employees, and other traditional residents of Galax, Virginia share their experiences, through recorded interviews, to adapt to or to help accommodate their new neighbors who are primarily working-class monolingual immigrants. Hispanic immigrants share their perspectives of adaptation to life and schools in this small town in Appalachia.

### Research Questions

The questions addressed in this study are: *What can be learned from the lived experience and perspectives of two diverse communities that interact in a small town in SW VA?*

- *How have their lives been structured, or restructured as a result of immigration?*
- *What are the impacts on the various peoples?*

*What has been the nature of learning from each other as the immigrants have assimilated into or adapted to the community?*

- *What has been the adaptation of the schools as they have attempted to deal with the influx of Hispanic children?*

- *How do various participants describe their degree of comfort/satisfaction with the adaptations they are making?*
- *How does learning occur in and outside of schools?*

#### Methodology/Researcher

A case study methodology is employed including semi-structured and open interviews with participants native to the local community and with Hispanic immigrants, focus groups, and observations. The researcher is a native Virginian, Anglo, grew up in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains, studied as an undergraduate in Western North Carolina, lived in Mexico for over two decades and is bilingual (English/Spanish).

#### Proposed Outcome and Audience

The final product of the research is in the form of a narrative, composed of five chapters that include vignettes, authentic voices of the participants, literature review and analyses. The intended audience for the study includes primarily English-speaking professionals involved in education, including principals, teachers, and guidance-counselors. The study may be helpful to people involved in higher education, including professors of teacher education and educational leadership, as well as college administrators who need to address the new realities of their changing communities due to immigration factors. Community leaders representing both immigrant and indigenous populations may benefit from the study of one community's experience with change. Policy-makers, as those who make decisions that impact people from local to global communities, may find the study helpful as a resource. Finally, for the Spanish-speaking community:

*miembros de la comunidad conocida en los estados unidos como Latina o Hispana, ofrezco un ejemplo de los muchos que demuestran la habilidad de la Raza para adaptarse a condiciones extrañas, la comunidad que es la más afectada por los cambios geográficos, económicos, culturales, lingüísticos, y socio-políticos en un país a la vez vecino y extraño.*

#### Background of the Study: The New Latino Diaspora

Southern Appalachia became a receiving ground for large numbers of Scotch-Irish and German immigrants, along with African slaves during the period of colonization (Hill & Beaver,

1998). However, over the past decade, unprecedented numbers of primarily Mexican immigrants have located in cities and in rural towns and communities in the Southeastern U.S. (Greene, 2006; Cravey, 2003; Hill & Beaver, 1998; Huntington, 2004; Smith, 1998, 2005; Smith, Mendoza, & Ciscel, 2005; U.S. Census, 2006; Wortham, Murillo, & Hamann, 2002). Despite this social transformation in the U.S. South, for many traditional residents the world of the new immigrants remains largely invisible (Cravey, 2003)<sup>1</sup>.

The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), along with a global easing of tariffs, set in motion hemispheric economic forces that have resulted in job loss rather than increase as promised in Mexico (Faux, 2006). Job loss and underemployment are especially felt in the areas of small agriculture, industry, and service-oriented employment—the traditional mainstay of the worker class (Pickard, 2005). These unleashed economic forces are transforming not only traditional national boundaries that governed economics, but also social, political, and demographic dynamics (Sassen, 1996). One of the manifestations of hemispheric economics is the phenomenon of undocumented and unprecedented immigration from Mexico and Central America into the United States (Faux, 2006; Hanson, 2003; Huntington, 2004).

Economic hardship, including lack of employment in sending communities south of the U.S. southern border, is a principle motivator for the new pioneers to the U.S. who face enormous risks on their journeys from Mexico and Central America (Heredia, 2004; Martinez, 2001; Peters, 1998; Pickard, 2005; Ruiz, 2003; Zuñiga, 2006). Networking between sending communities and receiving communities along with employment opportunities within the Southeastern U.S. make immigration not only possible, but also attractive to millions of Mexican and Central Americans (Green, 2006; Baker, Bean, Latapi, & Wientraub, 1998; Cornelius, 2001). Originally, the immigrants were seasonal migrant workers, whose tenure in a local Southeastern community might include several months before moving on, either to another seasonal employment locale or a return migration to their home communities in Mexico or Central America (Cornelius, 2001; Cravey, 2003). However, since the early 1990s this migratory pattern has shifted to more permanent living patterns, as the burgeoning U.S. economy became structurally dependant upon cheap Mexican labor (Cornelius, 2001; Smith, 1998). What some researchers identify as the New Latino Diaspora initially involved primarily single men, or

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<sup>1</sup> The nationwide demonstrations in April and May, 2006 by the undocumented and their supporters against the punitive measures being debated in the House and Senate brought the invisible out of the shadows for mainstream citizens of the U.S.

married men alone, who came to non-traditional immigrant receiving communities in the Southeastern U.S. to work as laborers in agriculture, including apple orchards and Christmas tree farms in Western N.C. and Virginia, poultry processing plants, construction, lawn maintenance, restaurants, and lumber or furniture industries (Cravey, 2003; Wortham et al., 2002).

In the late 1990s and into the new millennium, the single male pattern of Hispanic immigrants, while still dominant, has yielded in part to include women and children, who often are the wives, sisters and children of earlier migrant workers. Stricter immigration policies and law enforcement on the U.S. southern border post 9-11 have curtailed much of the return migration patterns, causing undocumented workers to remain for extended periods in receiving communities, and increasing the likelihood of marriage or sexual unions as immigrants adapt to changing conditions (Baker et al., 1998; Huntington, 2004). Currently, many children are born each year to Hispanic immigrant couples within the Southeastern U.S. These combined phenomena have significantly altered the demographic and cultural profiles of cities and counties such as Charlotte, and Mecklenburg County in N.C., Durham County and surrounding towns, also in N.C., and Atlanta, Georgia and surrounding counties, among many others. Estimates range from a very low 400,000 to a high of over 800,000 Hispanic immigrants in North Carolina, making Hispanic immigrants a very significant percentage of the total population (Cravey, 2003; U.S. Census, 2004). Since the average age of Hispanic immigrants is within childbearing years, and traditional cultural patterns include larger families, schools are rapidly changing in complexion in the communities with high immigration.

### *Hispanic Immigrants in Appalachia*

Less obvious to those outside the context perhaps, is the impact these Hispanic immigrant populations make on traditionally small, conservative, mostly white Anglo-European, Protestant communities in the rural South (Smith, 2005). More curious is the fact that these primarily monolingual Spanish-speaking Hispanic communities have grown in areas of Appalachia not traditionally perceived to be welcoming to “outsiders,” “flatlanders,” or “foreigners,” all terms from Appalachia that refer to people from outside the local communities (Beaver, 1986). The casual observer may consider the problems both communities face when they engage one another due to differences in language, cultural practices, ethnicity, historical backgrounds, including the European divide over Protestant and Roman Catholic traditions exported to the Americas during the Colonial Period (Huntington, 2004; Neville, 1998). These and other

differences of perception, combined with lack of knowledge of the other, are daily realities that lead to misunderstanding for both communities, which are simultaneously victims and agents of change within a global economy in a common hemisphere. There is a paucity of literature and research focused on the phenomenon of Hispanic immigration in small towns in the South. Hill and Beaver (1998) call for studies that address questions such as: “How do the new immigrants restructure their lives and build communities within the context of the traditional racial/ethnic groups in the region [South] and how do they impact whites and African Americans? (Hill & Beaver, 1998, p. 26)”

### *Galax*

The small town of Galax, located in southwest Virginia has experienced the phenomena of significant Hispanic immigration over the past decade. A trend of immigration that began with the familiar pattern of single male seasonal workers only a decade ago has become a significant and growing community of families of immigrants, with many children born each year in the Galax community. Recent data on Galax schools reveals Hispanics represent 9% of the high school population, 16% of the middle school and 20% of the elementary schools (GreatSchools.net, 2004). Galax provides a compact model of change in a rural community in Appalachia due to significant immigration as a byproduct of global and hemispheric economic policy. Community discourse along with individual narratives from stakeholders representing the indigenous and the immigrant communities in Galax have much to add to our understanding of how communities experience changes brought about by the immigration experience. This study allows the participants of these changes to voice their perspectives and experiences.

### *Schools and Other Places of Encounter*

Since schools are immediately impacted when migrations occur, many studies on the recent Hispanic immigration have been focused within the schools or on school policy (Reyes, Scribner, & Scribner, 1999; Suarez-Orozco, 1998; Trueba, 1999; Wainer, 2004; Wortham et al., 2002). Some school-based studies focus on a best-practices approach for schools dealing with significant populations of Hispanic children from a hierarchal position, (i.e. “what can we do with them?;” or “how can we assimilate them as quickly as possible?”). See for example: Papalewis & Fortune, 2002; Romo, 1999; Slavin, & Calderón, 2001. In contrast, other school-based studies (Delgado-Gaitán, 1990; Delgado-Gaitán & Trueba, 1991; Trueba, 1999; Zou &

Trueba, 1998) deal with discourse issues of power, ethnicity, and language, including the politicized bilingual approach to learning from the view of the Latino, (i.e. “what are our rights within the U.S.?”). As in many other areas in the south impacted by the new Latino Diaspora, school personnel in Galax did not have the linguistic and cultural background and knowledge in order to provide a quality educational experience for this population (Wainer, 2004). In this descriptive study, based on the perspectives of stakeholders in the Galax schools, I examine the strategies that local schools and individual teachers adapted to address the educational needs and challenges that they faced with a sudden influx of monolingual Spanish-speaking immigrant children. I observe classes and school events, interview and interact with teachers, administrators, and students in all three Galax schools over a period of a year and a half in an effort to understand the perspectives of the participants and to determine what may be learned from the Galax experience. Hispanic students share their perspectives on teachers, schools, learning, interactions with schoolmates, and the personal feelings of being Hispanic in Galax schools.

Although the focus of this study includes public schools in Galax as a nexus of the indigenous and immigrant community engagement, it is not confined to schools. Instead, I provide compact descriptions and perspectives of two communities—the indigenous receiving community of Galax and the Hispanic immigrant community—as they engage each other in the contexts of community life in Galax. While it would be naïve to consider each community homogenous or united in their perspectives, the framework of looking at two broad categories is useful for the purposes of addressing the study.

### *Theoretical Lens*

As this study shifts focus between the two communities in schools, the workplace, and other places of encounter, I employ a multiple theoretical approach that I find useful to understand each community and the forces at work in each. As a tool to analyze the dynamics of the relationships between people of different linguistic and cultural orientation, I borrow from critical theory, including discursive use of power, issues of race, class, and gender, and the exercise of human agency. When the study focuses on schools, I employ a Freirian-Vygotskian pedagogy of hope that positions me as a critical researcher and advocate for the least powerful while employing socio-cultural learning theories (Freire, 2002; Trueba, 1999; Vygotsky, 1986, 2002). As I examine people in the two communities who are adapting and seeking to make

meaning out of new or changing environments, I find it helpful to employ a socio-cognitive framework as explicated by Jerome Bruner (1990). In the following pages, I elaborate on the rationale of this interdisciplinary approach for the study.

Members of both the immigrant community and the traditional residents of Galax are involved in learning about each other, and learning from each other as they learn to live with each other (Gibson, 2002; Gutierrez, 1998). They are simultaneously engaged in making meaning of the changing dynamics of their lives and their sense of place, and they are also primarily people who are victims of forces that are at play in the international community at a period of global economics and hemispheric trade agreements (Faux, 2006; Martínez, 2001; Sassen, 1996; Smith, 1998, 2005; Suarez-Orozco, 2004). Both communities exercise the power available to them and as agents act upon their environment within their means and understanding. Both native Galax inhabitants and Hispanic immigrants learn from each other as they share or appropriate common spaces in schools, the workplace, churches, local parks, and markets. While uneven in scope and power, learning occurs for educators, management, entrepreneurs, pastors, health officials, law enforcement, volunteers, native and immigrant workers, native and immigrant children, and native and immigrant parents.

*Meaning making or folk psychology.*

Each person is faced with what Bruner (1990) calls “meaning-making” when encountering new phenomena. Borrowing from both his cognitivist background, as well as from anthropologists such as Clifford Geertz (1973), Bruner examines the ways people construct order from the chaos of life as it unfolds. According to Bruner, “the very shape of our lives—the rough and perpetually changing draft of our autobiography that we carry in our minds—is understandable to ourselves and to others only by virtue of those cultural systems of interpretation (p. 33).” As the previous sentence implies, this construction and reconstruction of meaning functions through the medium of narrative. Bruner terms “folk psychology” the system of making meaning of life’s experiences through organizing and constructing knowledge. Folk psychology seeks to make meaning of life through a culture’s interpretive system. A main premise of Bruner’s folk psychology is that people have beliefs and desires—beliefs about the world and life that concern the present, the past and the future—and desires that are generally compatible with our beliefs. Often, it is the unusual events of life that prompt people to recur to folk psychology in order to explain the extraordinary or make meaning of new circumstances.

Cultures have belief systems that may be similar yet lead to separate conclusions. For example, Protestant Christianity is an umbrella term that unites the faithful as non-Roman Catholics and who hold the Bible as canon and instructor of behavior and belief. When faced with the unsettling experience of having a sudden influx of Hispanic immigrants speaking Spanish who appear downtown, in stores, schools, public parks, workplaces, and who are often involved in behavioral patterns that are different from the mainstream, people respond differently. Some Protestants find meaning by a Biblical exhortation to “be kind to the foreigners;” “heal the sick, feed the hungry, clothe the naked” and see a parallel between the wanderings of the Israelites and the Hispanic immigrants. Other Protestant believers oriented by the same canon perceive undocumented immigrants as lawbreakers who should be deported. Still others use the same canon to seek to isolate the Hispanics in a segregationist approach to the phenomenon that sometimes manifests itself as xenophobia—fear or hatred of foreigners.

Belief systems include folk wisdom passed down from generation to generation such as often heard in normal conversation as proverbs or sayings. “What goes around comes around” may explain why things “went wrong” for an individual, a family, or even a country when it is perceived that the entity being discussed in some way transgressed. In those instances, folk wisdom provides a rationale of cause and effect or what may be referred to as poetic justice. When unexplained happenings occur, such as when tragedies occur to people who are judged as good people, expressions such as “the Good Lord knows why” are common in areas of Appalachia, and apparently mark an end of attempting to rationalize the seemingly unexplainable.

Hispanic immigrants proceed from communities that have developed particular means of explaining life’s experiences. The syncretism of indigenous, Iberian, and African heritages makes for interesting and mystical beliefs. “Ya le tocaba” (literally “it was his (her) time”) explains why something good or bad happened to a person, and is much different than the cause and effect rationale mentioned above that is common in Appalachia.<sup>2</sup> While beliefs that are observed frequently among Hispanics often contrast with common beliefs found in native residents of Galax, I have found interesting parallels. People in both communities who live close to the land, for example, seem to share many similar beliefs about life, family, a bond with the land, the government, herbal remedies, local and gifted healers, social relationships, and even

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<sup>2</sup> Jones (1991) noted that a fatalistic worldview is fairly common in Appalachia.



similar rituals such as homecoming and “decoration”—special days for remembering the dead and decorating gravesites in Appalachia—and the *Día de los Muertos* (Day of the Dead) in Mexico (Beaver, 1986; Jones, 1991; Monsiváis, 2001). They have similar respect for people who work hard. That fact alone has earned the respect of many locals for the Hispanic immigrants.

The cultural beliefs and expectations for the roles of men and women are traditionally somewhat similar between natives of Appalachia and Mexico, although the machismo of the Mexican male can include socially unacceptable behavior in this country such as domestic violence, infidelity, and even multiple wives and families. The words of the iconic mariachi song “El Rey” written by José Alfredo Jimenez immortalize the conflicts and contradictions of *Mexicanidad* (Mexicanness) from a male perspective. The opening lines begin:

“Yo sé bien que yo estoy afuera,  
 Pero el día en que yo me muera,  
 Sé que vas a llorar (coro “llorar y llorar, llorar y llorar”)  
 Dirás que no me quisiste,  
 Pero vas a estar muy triste,  
 Y así te vas a quedar.

Con dinero y sin dinero,  
 Hago siempre lo que quiero,  
 Y mi palabra es la ley;  
 No tengo trono ni reina,  
 Ni nadie que me comprenda,  
 Pero sigo siendo el Rey:” (El Rey, por José Alfredo Jimenez)

“I well know that I am out (have lost),  
 But the day I die,  
 I know you’re going to cry (chorus: “cry and cry, cry and cry”).  
 You’ll say you didn’t love me,  
 But you’re going to be very sad,  
 And sad you will remain.

With money and without,  
 I do whatever I want,  
 And my word is the law;  
 I don't have a throne or a queen,  
 Nor anyone who understands me,  
 But I am still the King!

While being a song for the cantina where males bond and share their frustrations, amazingly, the song is sung just as exuberantly by many females, especially when there is a fiesta atmosphere present and abundant tequila to go around. As ludicrous as it may seem, the song underscores the deep-rooted belief systems and expectations that cultural groups adhere to. Gutmann (1996) implies a sea change is occurring in the traditional male roles and identities in Mexico City, where men are increasingly taking on roles that were traditionally restricted to women, such as staying home and taking care of children. However, in the effort to debunk the stereotype of the worker class *macho Mexicano*, common in both popular culture and scholarly materials, he seems to create an antitype that is equally erroneous. Certainly, there is nothing new about Mexican men who are dedicated to family, including their wives; men who are hard working, self-sacrificing, honest and loyal. Gutmann illustrates his finding of the new maleness with a picture of a male gently holding an infant in his arms on the cover of the book; similar pictures are publicly available of men caressing children and holding them by the hand in the midst of the violent Mexican Revolution, some 80 years prior to Gutmann's study. Gutmann is correct in his conclusion that a more honest approach to research of maleness will reveal a much more complex portrait where virulent machismo coexists with a kinder, more gentle care giver, who shares domestic duties, and where homosexuals share space in a society where homophobia is prevalent. Daily readings of Mexico City newspapers, Hispanic television that beams into our home in the New River Valley, and annual visits to Mexico reveal that old beliefs and practices of male domination, sexism, abandonment of wives and families, and abuse of females are very much alive among males in Mexico. They would also prove to be traits that are present in Galax, and are a cause of concern for caring educators and volunteers.

As people native to Galax and the area interact with Hispanic immigrants, an unusual happening for both considering their unique places of origin, the meaning making or folk psychology of each community is activated. As will be discovered in this study, people who represent each community often provide different ways of explaining events. What is important or desirous for one community is not always paralleled in the other. In fact, often the values and desires are contradictory between communities.

### *A Theoretical Lens for Examining Schools*

#### *Freirian-Vygotskian pedagogy of hope.*

Mexican ethnographer Enrique (Henry) Trueba (1999) joins the principles of Brazilian Paulo Freire's "Pedagogy of the Oppressed (2002)" with the socio-cultural developmental theories of Russian Lev Vygotsky (1986, 2002) to focus on learning for empowerment of Mexican immigrant children in U.S. schools. Trueba calls this approach "critical ethnography and a Vygotskian, *pedagogy of hope* (Trueba, 1999, pp., 125, 132, 141)." Trueba calls for critical ethnography that identifies problems facing Mexican immigrant children and their families, and for ethnographers who position themselves as advocates for the children. These researchers must also understand and apply (praxis) Vygotskian developmental theories to assist Mexican immigrant children to attain higher level cognitive skills and thus be successful at school. "A *pedagogy of hope* based on Vygotskian principles, establishes the relationship between culture, language, and cognition as the foundation for understanding the role of culture in mediating the transmission of knowledge and intellectual growth" (Trueba, 1999, p. 141). For Trueba, a *pedagogy of hope*, focuses on critical pedagogy and "on the acquisition of higher mental functions of Mexican children in classrooms (p. 132)." In the following section, I review the fundamentals of both Freire and Vygotsky as they apply to the learning needs of Hispanic immigrant children in schools in the U.S.

The critical perspectives offered by Freire (2002), and Trueba (1999), are helpful in examining how primarily oppressed populations from Latin America achieve some measure of empowerment and emancipation through emigrating to Southwest Virginia, where jobs are available at significantly higher wages than in the home country. For Freire, a critical pedagogy involves becoming *concientizado*—a Brazilian term that includes emancipation from oppression by becoming literate or educated about the world. To become *concientizado*, a learner must also

learn the word, or logos, which includes acquiring an understanding about the forces at play to keep the poor in oppressed conditions and of the nature of oppression and oppressors. Being *concientizado* also involves praxis, or practical action that both speaks to power and acts against it in order to create more equitable conditions for the oppressed. Freire defined literacy as empowerment including “the ability to define one’s world” (Freire, 2002). Through immigration, whether via legal means or through the undocumented path, poor Hispanics defy conventional borders, risk incarceration and physical and psychological harm, in order to break from limited and oppressive employment environments to pursue a greater measure of freedom of choice. By doing so, they have defined their world as beyond the traditional borders that separated them from pursuing greater opportunities, and in the case of undocumented workers, have subverted power by appropriating space that official policy has denied them. Rodriguez (2004) points out that the undocumented alien is much more aware of the world than the California suburbanite, while acknowledging that “they” act [crossing borders, finding employment, live in the U.S.] without “our” permission. Unfortunately, as undocumented “aliens,” the relative freedom from one kind of oppression—economic—does not transfer to political emancipation. The undocumented adults, with an average of less than a middle school education, have yet to learn the word (logos) with its emancipating power, in a Freirian sense. The fate of millions of undocumented immigrants continues to be uncertain, although that discussion is broader than the focus of this study.

Critical pedagogy, as defined by Freire, includes a developmental approach to learning that contrasts with traditional, hegemonic practices. Freire (2002) defines and criticizes traditional educational strategies that ignore prior knowledge of learners. The traditional hierarchal “empty-head” approach to teaching and learning considers the learners to arrive with little or no knowledge relative to the subject. This approach sets the stage for instructors as experts to impart knowledge from a hierarchal position to the supposedly empty heads of learners that Freire termed “banking education.” Teachers deposit information and learners memorize in a transferal of knowledge. This approach to teaching and learning centers the instruction on the teacher rather than the learner, where the teacher fills a role sometimes referred to as the Atlas complex (Lee, & Van Patten, 1996). In this system, through the schooling dynamic, learners are also trained to be manipulated by those with power and influence, and thus the result of education is not emancipation.

Freireian critical pedagogy, in contrast, recognizes that the learner has knowledge prior to instruction and advocates strategies that activate prior knowledge while connecting new knowledge to old. Learners are presented with real world problems to solve. For Freire, “Liberating education consists in acts of cognition, not transferals of information (Freire, 2002, p. 79).” Liberating education means learning the word, and where the development of critical thinking skills is essential. Education becomes more of a dialogue, problems are posed, critical thinking is required, and learning is horizontal. The teacher-student relationship changes; where students were passive, now they team up with teachers as co-researchers in a dialogical relationship. While much of public education has embraced a developmental approach to teaching and learning, when it comes to immigrants, it may be argued that there is a process of subtraction of language and culture and a reverting to top-down paradigms (the empty-head approach) in the classroom (Valenzuela, 1999). I will discuss that more fully in the following chapter.

One more aspect of Freire that is important for this study is the place or positioning of the researcher or educator. Being *concientizado* implies the element of praxis, or pragmatic action on behalf of the participants. In my present work, it may imply looking for the hidden reasons that may affect a positive learning environment or dynamic for Hispanic immigrant children in Galax schools. Praxis would also involve writing or speaking to people with power about concerns that may arise as a result of the study. In Freire’s paradigm, the oppressor must also be emancipated.

Vygotsky (1986, 2002), as a social psychologist, complements Freirian principles as he emphasizes the role of social interaction in developmental learning. Learning happens through normal interactions between adults and children, or in a classroom environment between learners and experts. Learning exceeds what children would learn on their own without the assistance of caring adults through normal maturation. Learning also occurs among peers of unequal knowledge or achievement. According to Vygotsky, learners are able to accomplish certain tasks on their own, without the aid of an adult or expert. The level of development a child or learner has attained can be seen through the ability to accomplish a task and is called the *actual development level*. Vygotsky says that there is another developmental level called the *potential developmental level*, which represents the tasks a child can accomplish with the assistance of an adult or expert. The difference between the actual development level and the potential development level of the child, Vygotsky calls the *Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)*. The

ZPD indicates the level of complexity of a given task the child is capable of solving with expert assistance. “The ZPD defines those functions that have not yet matured but are in the process of maturation, functions that will mature tomorrow, but are currently in an embryonic state (Vygotsky, 1986, p.87).” “It is the difference between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance *or in collaboration with more capable peers* (p. 86, italics mine).”

The assistance proffered by an adult [expert], or more capable peer, to enable the learner to accomplish tasks that would be impossible for the learner alone is termed “*scaffolding*” (Vygotsky, 1986). The expert scaffolds by providing interesting materials and tasks, by motivating, by eliminating the problem aspects of the task that would be beyond the learner’s level to perform, by providing tools or information, by keeping the learner on task, and helping to reduce frustration or stress. The role of the instructor, as expert, then, is as a facilitator—to arrange a learning environment that includes accomplishing a series of tasks according to the developmental level of the learner. In the instance of Hispanic immigrants who are English language learners, scaffolding implies the need to provide language clues, including translations, the use of synonyms, gestures, illustrations, elaborations, and circumlocution, among other strategies. In schools like those in Galax, where there are very few teachers with the background knowledge and language skills of a significant population of the students, it becomes essential that peers have the freedom to provide scaffolding for each other.

The instructor must know the actual development level of the learner in order to offer the appropriate assistance for the ever-changing ZPD of the learner. The instructor needs to be able to verify through many formative assessment strategies that the child is developing through learning. As the learning and developmental processes continue, the potential development level is continually becoming the actual development level. Learners are not only acquiring knowledge to accomplish the immediate task, but through continuous interaction with experts are acquiring the intellectual tools with which to solve higher-level cognitive problems.

For Vygotsky (1986), thought development and language are interrelated. “Word meaning” (pp. 5-9) is the smallest unit of verbal thought, the internal aspect of a word that conveys meaning. “Word meaning is both thought and speech (p. 6).” Language is essential for the development of thought as well as to accomplish tasks. “Sometimes speech becomes of such

vital importance, that, if not permitted to use it, young children cannot accomplish the given task”(p. 7). Language development, as other higher level skill attainments, occurs in social interactions between learners and experts or more capable peers. Experts appeal to the known, where the actual development level of a learner is, while providing those required tools (scaffolding) in order for the learner to accomplish tasks within his or her ZPD. In chapters one and four, we will see that there are many implications for Hispanic immigrant children who are English language learners in schools in the U.S. The importance of Vygotskian principles, including the italicized phrase, *pedagogy of hope*, for Hispanic immigrant children in schools in Galax will become clear in the chapter on schools.

For Trueba, the manifestation of a *pedagogy of hope* is embodied in educators who are skilled in using both linguistic and cultural codes in engaging Mexican children in learning contexts according to the needs of the children (Trueba, 1999, pp. 137-140). This approach to learning embodies culture, language and cognition in what is often called culturally appropriate pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1994; 2001). In this learning paradigm, students are active in their own development, and are free to use their prior knowledge of language and culture and to “advance without prejudice” (Trueba, 1999, p.141). Teachers use linguistic and cultural knowledge familiar to the children to assist in communication to facilitate their continual developing skills to accomplish more complex tasks. In this paradigm, teachers are also advocates for students. By contrast, many educators and policy makers choose an assimilationist approach to learning for new immigrants, which often leads to disenfranchisement, marginalization, and may influence the dropout rate, which is remains particularly high among Mexican immigrants (Trueba, 1999, p.134; President’s Advisory Commission on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans, 2003, pp.2-3).

#### *Learning outside of school contexts.*

This study acknowledges that learning is not restricted to formal learning inside traditional classrooms; the scaffolding afforded learners of both immigrants and natives to Galax by those competent *as more capable peers* in their native language and culture enable those learners to perform or interact successfully with members of the other group. Schools, churches, places of employment, and market settings provide laboratories of language learning and cultural adaptation for each community, as well as interesting places for researchers to observe learning and change in the local community.

## Methodology

The researcher chose to do a descriptive bounded study focused on the perspectives of representatives from the native Galax population and the Hispanic immigrant community concerning changes associated with recent immigration into the community of Galax. For this case study, the researcher employed a triangulation approach to data collecting, through interviews, observations, field notes, reflections and analyses of documents and artifacts. Although interviewing was the primary data-gathering strategy for this study (Creswell, 2003), multiple sources of information allowed for a more comprehensive understanding of the context (Merriam, 2001, p. 137). The case study allows for rich description of the bounded system of the local community of Galax where interactions between the Mexican immigrants and the local or traditional residents occur, including schools, churches, places of employment and markets (Creswell, 1998; Merriam, 2001, p. 27).

The researcher engaged teachers and school leaders in the Galax elementary, middle, and high school and established relationships with members of the local community, both the native residents and the new immigrant families. The problems and concerns related to schooling for the Spanish-speaking immigrant children, as perceived by significant stakeholders, were considered. Some of the anticipated problems included obtaining permission to do the research, skepticism among practitioners, mistrust or fear, reluctance to recorded interviews, and issues of time restraints among potential participants. As it turned out, most of the participants contacted willingly participated and were in agreement to have their voices recorded and their actual names used. A few people contacted refused to participate and several participated in multiple conversations, but refused to grant permission to record the interviews. Opinions expressed by those in the latter category that appear in this study are carefully screened, and pseudonyms are used, in order to protect the privacy of the individuals. Although the participating immigrants who are out of status or labeled as undocumented with the U.S. Citizens and Immigration Services did not request the use of pseudonyms, however, they have been assigned them as a means of maintaining anonymity.

### *Important Considerations in the Research*

For the study to be fully understood, it is important to consider issues of researcher positioning, the particular approach to the immigrant community and the traditional community,



and some background knowledge of both communities. The researcher endeavored to maintain a neutral stance related to both communities, although critical pedagogy required working to empower oppressed people for emancipation (Freire, 2002; Trueba, 1999). More specific elaboration of the researcher positioning follows the section on methodology. The researcher clearly informed people of the purpose in conducting the study and endeavored to be aware of the social positioning of stakeholders (Stake, 1995). The location of interviews and meetings were not an issue with stakeholders, and the framework of the interviews and meetings were considered (Stringer, 1996, p. 81).

### *Interviews*

I conducted semi-structured interviews and asked open-ended questions with individuals and focus groups. Structure provides a way of collecting specific information, while open interviews encourage free expression of ideas (Merriam, 2001; Seidman, 1998). The researcher audiotaped the interviews and the interviews were transcribed by the researcher and by independent experts. While most of the interviews were conducted in English, it was necessary, useful, or requested that some be conducted in Spanish. In the case of Spanish-language interviews, when data is used in the narrative, I provided the English paraphrase or translation. While it may be argued that no translation is void of error, I endeavored to interpret the most appropriate English equivalent for the word or phrase based on meaning, rather than a word-for-word translation. Audio-tapes provided the benefits of a complete transcription of the interview and allowed for replaying and thus revisiting the text over time, as insight was gained through further literature analysis, reflection, and comparison with other sources of information (Merriam, 2001, pp 87-91). By recording the original interviews, any questions that may arise concerning exactly what was said and when, and in what context, is easily resolved (Seidman, 1998). I endeavored to record any significant non-verbal communication, as often as it is the non-verbal gesture and paralanguage that reveals otherwise hidden meaning in human communication, enhancing conversational analysis of the data. I analyzed the tapes inductively, allowing the text itself to speak, and with the intention to avoid researcher bias (Briggs, 1986; Merriam, 2001; Seidman, 1998). Although not practical or possible in every instance, member checks after transcription enabled the interviewee to make adjustments or clarifications. Among the fifteen recorded interviews, the following participants contributed: seven teachers; one principal; 18 students, including middle school and high school participants of approximately

50/50 ratio of native Galax and Hispanics, with a similar ratio of gender divisions; one Galax family of four; two Hispanic immigrant families of six and three respectively; and one police officer. Other unrecorded interviews included a former factory worker and a factory manager, and the local school superintendent and assistant superintendent.

### *Focus Groups*

In order to have more participants in a collaborative environment, I chose to include several focus groups among those interviewed. Focus groups are effective as a means of gathering data, as participants have an opportunity to provide peer-group information, modify member perspectives and add to knowledge of the subject. Among the focus groups who participated are students, parents, and teachers. The decision to use focus groups was based on the benefits of gaining insights into shared understandings of selected groups of people on a specific topic (Creswell, 1998; Gibbs, 1997; Krueger, 1994; Merriam, 2001).

### *Data Collection and Management*

Interviews were transcribed, themes categorized or bracketed, analyzing information to reduce it to its key elements (Stringer, 1999), and the data compared across the spectrum of the combined data. Data analyses was conducted by first, bracketing interesting segments from the transcript, often called “units of data” (Merriam, 2001, p. 179), then the segments were named or labeled with an identifier, and followed by comparison with other units of data for common themes and categories. Themes were coded, extrapolated, and filed. Content analysis, interactional analysis of social space and relationships, and conversational analysis of language were conducted as appropriate with the tapes. Themes were then cross-referenced with other transcripts, field notes and journal entries, sorting items once again by category name or label (Merriam, 2001). The categories “should reflect the purpose of the research question” (p. 183). Commonalities across individuals and groups, as well as differences in perceptions were then explored.

The participants were provided with the appropriate informed consent (see Appendix A) to read in the language of their choice, to sign and a copy to keep. Consent forms were filed appropriately. Participant permission to record the interview was also taped. Pseudonyms are used in the narrative of the final draft in the case of participants who request it, or, as explained earlier, in the case of those whose circumstances would so indicate. The tapes were used

exclusively for this study, and placed in the library at Virginia Tech one year from the completion of the project.

### *Observations*

For nearly two years, I have made regular visits to Galax. Often, the purpose of the visits was a well-defined data-collection strategy. Frequently, however, I took time to simply immerse myself in the local climate in informal interactions with people who represent both communities, and in a wide variety of settings. I formally observed classrooms from Pre-K, elementary, middle, and high school, and numerous soccer games both in Galax and in the playoff tournament in Radford in 2005 and 2006. I attended events, such as the centennial celebration of



the Galax schools, one high school graduation ceremony, the international day, and a health fair. I was invited to join, and did, a local non-profit group called the Hispanic Service Organization that seeks to do just that—provide free services to the Hispanic community as well as be a discussion group cultural mediator for the Galax community. This group meets an average of

once a month. I frequently stopped in to visit, chat, dine, and purchase goods in several market settings, especially at *El Progreso*, a *tiendita* (small ethnic supermarket) owned and operated by a couple who are from Mexico and Guatemala respectively, and two restaurants, *Tlaquepaque* and *El Parian*, owned and operated by Mexicans. These informal hours of visits added much to my understanding of the people, the places of interaction, and as a result helped to place the data and the study into a more mature context. The limited bonding I experimented with people in these places allowed them to feel more comfortable with me, and resulted in acquiring more information. Certainly, contextual clues enrich understanding of the context, and valuable insights emerge that can reshape interview questions (Merriam, 2001; Rossman & Rallis, 1998). I made field notes of the running record or descriptive data, personal comments during the observations (Rossman & Rallis, 1998), followed by reflections recorded in a series of research journals.

#### *Documents and Artifacts*

I make use of local newspapers, including the *Galax Gazette*, Spanish language newspapers published in the region including the Galax-based *Notihispano*, as a means of acquiring more data to enrich the thick description of the local community. I examined Hispanic student work among other artifacts and symbols that helped contribute to my learning of the context (Geertz, 1995).

#### *Participant research assistant.*

Another essential element in this study is the active participation as a research assistant of Elizabeth Stringer—a dynamic English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher in the Galax public school system. She is a striking individual, with very dark hair and eyes, set in a background of milky-white skin, who could easily pass for a person of Spanish descent, of the northern Iberian strain rather than the mestizo, the latter bearing stronger indigenous heritage features. She is very active among the Hispanic community in Galax, has learned Spanish, and bubbles with enthusiasm in describing her town, schools, and her work with children and adults through her church. She is a very active advocate for the local Hispanic community.

Elizabeth is a vital person in a town like Galax that has experienced particular stress due to rapid demographic, linguistic and cultural change. As a native of Galax and a former monolingual English speaker who has become bilingual, she serves as a cultural interpreter for

both the native Galax community and the Hispanic immigrant community. She shares concerns for both communities, including problems associated with change. She understands her native community, including the problems many citizens have with the changes due to the presence of so many Hispanic immigrants. I have the feeling that she is caught between loyalties, between love of place, family, community, church, and the needs of the immigrant community. Not all of her native community is happy with her choices of where she spends her time, and what she does with the foreigners, as many of the immigrants have opened their arms and homes to her.

Elizabeth is another individual who demonstrates and reveals the changes that are happening in Appalachia due to immigration. She is one of a small group of people who belong as natives to one community but have embraced the other, and who sustain relationships in both, and who have devised a positive approach at making meaning of their changing worlds.

By embracing the other, Elizabeth accepts change and actively works within the larger local community to promote successful adaptation for both original communities. She has become literate, in a Freirian sense, by recognizing local conditions of structure and class, and by working for change by living, studying, teaching, working, worshipping, and buying and selling with members of both communities. By participating in positive engagement with otherness, she participates in changing social structures in Appalachia and in the South (Hill & Beaver, 1998). She has learned from her new neighbors, different in language and origin, by interacting socially and linguistically. Elizabeth is in a sense, a developing expert, who provides scaffolding for English language learners among the Hispanic community and for the native Galax community, who are also learners concerning their new neighbors. Elizabeth has been invaluable to the research for this study by being knowledgeable about people from both communities and for making key contacts and arranging meetings. People like Elizabeth help us to understand changes in communities through their individual perceptions of attitudes and conditions that are on the hearts and minds of people who tend to be more homogeneous to one community. It is helpful to talk with and about a person like Elizabeth en route to a further discussion of the community and place from which she proceeds. But before discussing the context of Galax in more detail, it may be useful to state the approach this narrative employs.

#### *A Note on the Compilation of the Narrative*

As I begin this narrative of the experiences of people from Mexico who currently live in rural Southwest Virginia and those of traditional residents of the small town where the

immigrants live, I am conscious of the limitations due to access, to deeply held thoughts and feelings of members of both communities, to my ability to comprehend what participants mean by revealing their thoughts, and the bias that is inevitable through developing a narrative of my own concoction. By framing the questions I pose, I am consciously or unconsciously steering the data towards an end that may be completely different than what is intended by participants, or what is objective. I am not an ethnographer, yet I proposed to do some of the work of ethnographers by spending time with individuals and groups that represent two communities, by interviewing individuals and focus groups, by observing, journaling and reflecting, by analyzing data gathered, and finally by writing a narrative of the entire study.

Because I have created a document, I have invented. The invention follows tropes or patterns with which my readers and I are familiar (Clifford & Marcus, 1986; Crapazano, 1986). The act of invention, in a sense, subverts the stories of the people I proposed to represent by analyzing and organizing the telling of them (Geertz, 1995). The stories I chose to include, or not, support the poetics and politics of my creation (Clifford & Marcus, 1986). As much as possible, I allowed the participants to speak their own narratives. From those narratives, I created another of my own that must be readable to the intended audience. While in some instances member checks allow for participants to clarify or reject my notions of their intent, the ultimate text is my own, and is flawed with my personal bias and limitations.

I am, in a sense, interpreting and translating—tasks fraught with both intentional and unintentional deceptions (Banda-Rascón, 2000; Crapazano, 1986). In many instances I am literally translating from one language into another. The results may be judged as subjectively as are many of the decisions made in developing the narrative. It is my commitment to be as objective as possible—to be as fair as I can to portray the intent of each participant—into the “translation” of the data into a readable narrative. I abandon preconceptions as much as possible, and have no personal agenda to prove as a thesis. It will be the task of the reader to discern the voices of the participants from the narrator, as well as to judge the value of the narrative.

The greatest bias I bring is concern for the Mexican and Hispanic immigrant, and critical perspectives of the forces of global markets, lack of opportunities and development in Latin America. In my mind, much of those lamentable conditions are due to a joint failure of U.S. vision and policy, big business interests and that of governments in Latin America. Those institutions of power contribute to create and sustain conditions that place both Hispanic

immigrants and traditional residents of rural Appalachia into the difficult decisions that they must make, and adapt to the conditions of those decisions (Faux, 2006; Mendoza, Montaner, & Llosa, 1998; Montaner, 2001; Suárez-Orozco, & Qin-Hilliard, 2004).

Schools, including teachers, administrators, support personnel and parents are forced to adapt and learn linguistic tools, and cultural nuance that normally take years of study and immersion in optimal conditions in order to administer to the legitimate needs of children of immigrants. Universities, including Schools of Education, are slow to acknowledge the need to prepare teachers and administrators to face the challenge of bilingual and bicultural conditions, lack personnel to address the issue, and have little funding to do so (Wainer, 2004). The decision to face these changing conditions is not by choice of the local schools—the need to fund the training and materials required is imposed upon schools and communities. Market forces have been purposely unleashed through various free-trade agreements that set the stage for movements of people to cross traditional national borders in search of employment, and that impact local receiving communities as well as sending communities (Hill & Beaver, 1998; Martinez, 2001; Suárez-Orozco, & Qin-Hilliard, 2004). Governments have lagged in addressing realistic migratory reform to keep pace with the economic forces they have encouraged, and have been myopic or naïve in ignoring the impact on communities on both sides of the U.S. southern border (Hanson, 2003; Huntington, 2004; Sassen, 1996; Suárez-Orozco, & Qin-Hilliard, 2004).

Certainly, the rural poor of Appalachia have been exploited by external forces over several centuries (Beaver, 1986; Berry, 2000; Creavy, 2003; Harrison, 1998; Mitchell, 1991; Smith, 1998), although it may be argued that the forefathers of the traditional residents exercised agency by migrating to the area and appropriating space from native populations (Beaver & Lewis, 1998; Neville, 1998), not including members of the small Black community. The democratic and economic opportunities afforded indigenous residents of the Blue Ridge Mountains in the Galax community perhaps are incomparable to those of the poor of Mexico over the same period of time (Montaner, 2001). While in the greater Appalachians, the Great Migration (1945-1960) and subsequent out-migrations separated people from their land and families (Berry, 2000), Galax appears to have survived the huge out-migration experienced in other areas of Appalachia. Census figures show slow but steady growth over the twentieth century, probably due to the local employment available in the furniture, textile, and mirror

factories (figure 1).<sup>3</sup> Today, members of both communities are faced with tough decisions about employment and separation from family and home. However, in the late twentieth century and into the present, of the two communities, only one has seen the necessity to risk border crossing, extended family separation, employment and living in a country that speaks a different language and where their rights are nil. It is undeniable that the poor of Mexico and Central America are accustomed to being oppressed, have limited opportunities for upward mobility, and choose immigration as a means of survival and possible advancement (Faux, 2006; Mendoza, et al, 1998; Montaner, 2001; Pickard, 2005; Trueba, 1998). In many cases, the act of border crossing without documentation is in itself an act of desperation (Suarez-Orozco, 2001). My bias for these poor is very real, although my intent is to be fair and objective in creating the narrative that follows.

Table 1

*Galax and Carroll County Demographics*

*19<sup>th</sup> Century thru 2006*

Year	Galax	Carroll County
1850	N/A	996 families
1910	N/A	21,116
1930	2,544	22,141
1950	5,248	26,695
1970	6,278	23,092
1980	6,524	
2000	6,837	29,245
2006	7,000	

<sup>3</sup> While Carroll County census figures show a decrease in population during the years from 1950-1970, with the larger percentage of out-migrants from the African American community, the Galax population actually increases over the period, including members of the African American community. See Tables 1, 2, and 3.



Table 2

*Carroll County Demographics by Race*

Carroll County	African American	Other	Hispanic
1850	157 slaves	N/A	
1910	268	N/A	
1930	374	N/A	
1950	392	26	
1970	99	4 (Indian), 9	
2000	129	122 (Native American)	479

*Researcher Embeddedness in the Narrative*

As a genre, ethnography encourages the intrusion of the researcher into the narrative (Clifford & Marcus, 1986). In this study, I attempt to make my own meaning out of the experiences of members of both communities by using my personal background as an immigrant and a second language learner as a filter. I also attempt to employ a literary device of narrative storyteller to break up the narrative from data, including participant narratives and analyses, into some semblance of readable text.

*Researcher Background*

In this section, I address my personal journey over more than two decades of living in Mexico, with the objective of establishing (1) my interest in the people of Mexico; (2) the transformations experienced personally by living in a series of very distinct cultural and linguistic groups in Mexico; (3) personal identification with the challenges an immigrant faces in a foreign country with learning, assimilation and or adapting, while I readily acknowledge the experiences of a Caucasian English speaker with a college education from the U.S. with a tourist visa in Mexico in no way approaches the struggle of an undocumented brown-skinned Mexican seeking employment in the southern U.S.; (4) the development of a critical theory perspective including advocacy for the oppressed or disadvantaged, and (5) personal experience in Appalachia.

In July of 1973, I went to live in Mexico City, where I worked as a non-affiliated faith-based youth worker in three very distinct sections of the city of at that time, eight million inhabitants. One group met in a protestant church in the elite neighborhood known as *Las Lomas*. The youth there were virtually all bilingual and bicultural, attended affluent multilingual schools, many were fluent in several languages and had lived in various parts of the world. The language of choice in most settings was English, with occasional sophisticated or colloquial switches into Spanish, and even French or German. Another group met in a beautiful home in a middle-class section of town called *La Colonia del Valle*, although this group was composed of youth from different economic and cultural backgrounds. Most of the youth leaders were very knowledgeable of the inner workings of Mexican and international politics. The language was Spanish, and the normal middle-class language had been influenced by a popular trend among the urban youth of the day, called *caló*.

As I reflect upon it now, *caló* in some degree is comparable to the language common among the drug culture of the 1960s in the U.S., akin even to the inner city slang common in the U.S. today, although it is interesting to note the perspectives that exist from people who have lived experience in other locales (Anzaldúa, 1999). It was said that the *caló* picked up by this group was directly influenced by people who had spent some time incarcerated for various misdemeanors, but the genre also sanctioned the intrusion of selected English words for effect, including the English equivalent of Spanish first names. Language play (Vygotsky, 1986) was a normal part of the interactions among the youth of this group, including experimenting with the effect words produced among peers when traditional use of terms was subverted. As a rule, Mexicans are famous for inventing double-meanings for words, as well as shaping words with endings to produce nuance, both traits that continuously reinvent language (Oster, 1989; Paz, 1970; 1987). The challenge for the learner of Spanish is magnified in that context, as new vocabulary words emerge in normal conversation, but with subverted meanings. The learner of Spanish had a double-burden to be knowledgeable about the original definition of a term or phrase, be quick to capture the subverted meaning in context when it appeared, and be conscious of genre when experimenting with these meanings in interactions with native speakers. I personally embarrassed myself and my audience as well as provided comic relief on many occasions by employing terms acceptable among youth groups, but frowned upon by adult professionals.

The third group of young people attempted to offer assistance to folks living in a makeshift ghetto area called *una ciudad perdida*—literally and metaphorically translated—a lost city. Lost cities were typically formed by squatters called *paracaidistas*—literally parachutists (they come from nowhere), and often a result of rural-to-urban migration. One of the city newspapers in those years reported that there were upwards of one hundred and sixty lost cities in the greater Mexico City area. I once estimated the number of people living in the *ciudad perdida* that this group visited regularly by counting the number of people I knew personally in the rustic rooms constructed of sheet metal, corrugated material, and dirt floors by figuring roughly the square feet of the dwellings, and then walking the perimeter of the two blocks outside. Using those measures I was shocked to think of the possibility of perhaps between 16,000 and 20,000 people living on one level within such a confined space.

There were only one or two faucets for the entire compound, sewage drained along openly, criss-crossing the dirt paths throughout; the rainy season created serious problems of flooding and contamination. It was common to see small children sick, some with rat bites, and in many instances, men—fathers, common law husbands, or lovers, only came to visit. Somewhat similar socio-economic patterns as those of the lost cities were the subject of Oscar Lewis' anthropological work in Mexico City (Lewis, 1963). I remember vividly one older couple, both very ill and barely able to move, both cooked and heated their “room” during the cold months with wooden charcoal on a simple tin grill called an *anafre*. The lady would use her fingers to move around the live coals, seemingly with no sense of pain. Only a short time later she passed away; perhaps she had lost most of her sense of feeling due to the cancer that devastated her body. The language of the people living here was yet another genre; simple, earthy, limited in the extent of vocabulary, yet poignant in meaning.

This initial period of living in Mexico was by far the most intensive and holistic learning experience of my life through the interaction with the groups and in the homes of many of the participants. More than not, the people sheltered and showered me with hospitality, demonstrated how they valued our relationships for reasons beyond my comprehension, and actively engaged in my learning experience, both linguistically, politically, culturally, and socially. As learning developed through becoming increasingly fluent, the more I unconsciously went through a process of deconstruction of the world as it had been framed in my Anglo Southeastern U.S. middle-class upbringing, even as I endeavored to make meaning in this new reality (Bruner,

1990). I was largely ignorant of, and perhaps unfettered by the angst of cultural anthropologists of the period, who bore the burden of maintaining multiple roles of participant-observer-scribe/interpreter (Clifford, & Marcus, 1986). I was there to learn and embrace the concerns from the very different groups I was engaging, rather than to observe indigenous culture, and did not carry guilt for working with local people for the changes they defined desirable (Pratt, 1986). While I did need to understand culture, and in that sense, to interpret (Geertz, 1973, 1995), yet I was not creating a written narrative (Crapanzano, 1986) of any consequence. I had nothing to give but myself, and there was little to no material co-dependency established. Three years went by swiftly, broken by a six month foray into a period of study at a university in nearby Cholula, Puebla, and that was highlighted by exploring the rural countryside, with its numerous small villages, by horseback on long rides outside of class and study time.

Later, after several trips to the southern state of Oaxaca, being deeply moved by the mysticism, the geography, the vast indigenous population and the poverty I encountered, I decided to relocate initially to the capital city of Oaxaca, and later to a village in the High Mixtec. The next six years would challenge me as nothing ever had as I endeavored to learn and work with indigenous people, many of whom spoke little or no Spanish, in towns and villages scattered throughout the state of Oaxaca, Guerrero, and southern Veracruz, all states that form part of what is often called *México Profundo*, or Deep Mexico (Krauze, 1997).

Of all that I had learned in Mexico City, much, if not most did not apply in these rural indigenous communities. Frustrated, and certainly frustrating my Oaxacan friends, I sought help in the academy for keys to understanding the more subtle and complex environments in which I was attempting to work. Months of poring over texts of history and anthropology ensued, along with extended conversations with an anthropologist friend on trips to the university where I had studied earlier, and with linguists and missionaries who had experience in village life. Slowly relationships were built on mutual trust, and I eventually experienced one of the most deeply satisfying periods of my life by becoming competent to engage individuals and groups in meaningful dialogues and projects in indigenous Oaxaca. Despite friendships formed in many crises, including physical danger, threats of violence, and the birth of two sons attended by local midwives, no Oaxacan would have ever said that I was one of them. To the indigenous peoples, I would always remain an outsider, as do Mexicans from outside the local communities.

Although benefiting greatly from the work of anthropologists, I continued to be free from many of the constraints of the academy while living and working with indigenous communities (Clifford, & Marcus, 1986). There were obvious changes in local communities through interaction with outsiders such as myself, just as the same interaction effected changes in me. Respectful of and intrigued by local culture, I had no desire to remain objective, as a scientist. Although not free of repressive methods, my purpose was not to impose outside values, but to engage the concerns voiced by the local communities themselves, which typically included alcoholism, spousal abuse, violence, systemic oppression, economics, and literacy. Linguistically, it was imperative to learn to speak with fewer words, carefully selected for simplicity, clarity, imagery and regional nuances. Culturally, the challenge was to understand what were the symbols, relationships, and past and present concerns in each area (Geertz, 1973) in order to explore the space available, if any, to a person from outside the community. I was an intruder (Crapanzano, 1986), but when welcomed by members of local communities. I learned the value of listening, observing, reflecting, and the value indigenous communities place on social conventions that require extended time (Briggs, 1986).

Later in the mid-1980s, I became involved in developing a non-profit faith-based organization involving a community of people in a large city in the central part of the country. By this time, the struggles of Mexicans had become my own, and the community flourished in relationships based on trust and unity in a common struggle for better lives, families and communities. In the decade prior, I had not only been educated by Mexicans, but I had been to some degree *concientizado*, or transformed using the Freireian term. It was during this period that middle-class Mexicans frequently commented, “Tú ya eres Mexicano,”—(“you are now a Mexican [one of *us*]).” Even when statements such as that were not made, I discovered that there were behavioral changes in my co-workers and colleagues, such as the dissipation of normal barriers to foreigners, and meaningful relationships were established. It had taken a decade or more, but I realized I had new social capital that translated into streamlining new relationships, and that made more ambitious goals feasible. In central Mexico among largely middle-class people, our organization was able to develop successful community based projects including schools, outreach programs, substance abuse rehabilitation, and marriage and leadership development. Over time, leaders emerged who developed similar organizations in numerous towns and states in central and southern Mexico. Eventually, a Mexican international network

developed involved in training, supervising and funding Mexican nationals working in Europe, North Africa, Central and South America, and Japan. Since my departure in 1992, the organizations have grown many-fold under indigenous leadership.

*The immigrant influences the receiving community.*

Some would argue that influence such as mine was negative, manipulative, exploitative, while others would argue for the positive outcomes of individuals becoming literate, empowered to embrace roles of ethical and moral leadership to which many could have only dreamed. Regardless of the perspective on those labors, the axiom remains: The immigrant is forced to adapt, to change, and always influences change in receiving communities (Rodriguez, 2004). I personally experienced being assaulted, insulted, threatened, rejected, accused of being a CIA agent, but more often than not, was welcomed in hundreds of homes throughout Mexico. Often that reception was probably out of deference, and/or exploitative on behalf of my hosts for tenuous social reasons (Oster, 1989). The more positive of those engagements transcended the superficial norms, where the outsider was not treated as such, neither better than, nor as object of exploitation, but as equal, with warts and all.

On my infrequent trips to the U.S., I began to realize that being changed by and into another culture may create serious complications in one's native country. It was during this period, in the mid 1980s, that I began to identify not only with Mexicans, but also with Mexico, and its struggle for democracy, and economic and political interests. The following decade strengthened that perspective, and sharpened my critical awareness of forces that tend to promote the continuous subjugation and impoverishment of entire groups of people, of the hegemony that living next to the U.S. forces upon the Mexican people and government, and of the subtle ways that individuals and communities develop to survive and in the process, subvert power. By the time I departed Mexico to return to my native Virginia in 1997, twenty-four years had transpired, well over half of my life, including most of my adult life.

I approach this study with increasing awareness of the forces that exert influence upon Mexican communities to migrate north, to immigrate with or without documentation, and embrace the ambivalent feelings often acknowledged by immigrants of respect and appreciation for the U.S., tempered with a critical view of its mixed-messages of acceptance-rejection and segregation. It was astonishing to enter villages hours away from paved roads in Oaxaca to find virtually no men present in the 1980s. The explanation was that the men had gone *al norte*, north,

to work. The traditional small communal farm lands, in some instances impoverished by deforestation, and affected by years of drought, simply were incapable of sustaining the local communities with growing and changing needs. Being highly esteemed as excellent workers, willing to do tasks few mainstream Americans are, and being segregated, ridiculed, despised and lobbied against are dichotomous experiences common to Mexican immigrants, and that tend to swing with the pendulum of economic fortunes (Myers, 1996; Portes & Rumbaut, 1996a). In times of economic growth, border controls are lax and the message of welcome is clear, while a downturn inspires a new round of dialogue with an emphasis on legality, controls, and surplus labor capital (Cornelius, 2001).

Middle-class students study critical analysis to discern their world, while the impoverished immigrant understands: “The immigrant knows the reality of our world decades before the Californian suburbanite will ever get the point” (Urrea, 1996; Rodriguez, 2004). Global forces have dried up traditional sources of employment for a worker class in Mexico; responding to global opportunities they migrate to urban areas, to the border areas, and beyond the limits of Mexican law. While U.S. citizens largely remain in the dark concerning changing borders, including traditional national boundaries and the legal issues that are in flux, intrepid Mexicans seize the moment, often at great personal jeopardy, and cross over into restricted space in response to the new economic world that has been imposed upon them (Faux, 2006; Martinez, 2001; Sassen, 1996).

I have crossed the Mexican-American border probably well over a hundred times in distinct modes of transportation, and from points spanning the extremes of west to east, that is, from Tijuana-San Diego to Matamoros-Brownsville. I have been a guest in homes, mostly of Mexican ownership, across the same distance and on both sides of the line, and have stayed in hotels also on both sides. I recall nights of little sleep as the constant drone and spotlights of patrolling helicopters circled constantly, vigilantly watching “our” southern border. I have watched the cat-and-mouse game of the perpetual efforts of immigrants to cross over without being detected as a U.S. official’s presence intimidates, provoking a quick return, over and over, until, in a moment’s distraction by the official, the cross-over is initially successful, and a foot race begins. I have realized the need for the warning signs near the border in California, with the symbol of peasants running across the six lane highway.

Once, I ferried two highly appreciated workers for a Texas rancher across the border back into Mexico, theoretically to insure that the Mexican officials wouldn't steal their wages upon return to their communities. I have seen the inside of *maquiladoras*, and been overwhelmed with the heat, noise levels, industrial dust and conditions of labor (Cravey, A.J., 1998; Peña, 1997), and have marveled at how so many human beings could continue to do the same tasks over time, and have dined on the abundance, so hospitably proffered by the owners of factories. I have watched the growth of children of Hispanic friends through the school years in U.S. schools, and listened to their trials and triumphs. I taught English as a foreign language (EFL) and was academic coordinator for the English Language Department at a University in Mexico; have taught Spanish in high school and at Virginia Tech, was a mentor to foreign language teachers in training for several years at Virginia Tech, and am currently a consultant for an academic consortium designing a new curriculum of Spanish instruction for a government agency.

Born in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia, the sights, linguistic charm, and tales of Appalachia were an integral part of my early life, teenage years, college years near Asheville, North Carolina, a sabbatical year spent largely in Avery County, North Carolina in the late 1980s, and now in the New River Valley. The values of family, land and religion or church were strong influences in my upbringing as they tend to be throughout rural Appalachia (Beaver, 1986; Jones, 1991). Although certainly labeled a flatlander or outsider for many of the mountain community residents, Appalachia feels as much like home to me as any area of the United States. My wife and I are frequent guests of native mountain residents, who also continue to contribute to my understanding of the ways and beliefs of local folk. I have served as a cultural and linguistic bridge to interpret between native Appalachian mountain business and professional people and Hispanic immigrants who live in Appalachia. The lifelong love for the geography of Western Virginia and Western North Carolina probably prepared me to extend that love to the mountainous terrain that constitutes much of Mexico.

*Note on terms and choice of language use in the text*

As a person who has lived and worked in a variety of linguistic contexts, I consciously and unconsciously pay attention to the use and choice of language and terms by a region's indigenous people. As a second language learner, I try to incorporate new terms and phrases into my internal lexicon with as close an imitation to the indigenous sounds as possible when interacting with people from a particular region. As a researcher, I choose to allow indigenous



people to define themselves and their worlds. Throughout this narrative selected Spanish words and phrases are sprinkled, generally with an equivalent meaning in English, in an attempt to allow the text to speak more closely to the indigenous voices it seeks to reveal. As a cultural mediator, I attempt to free these words and phrases from an audience limited to Spanish speakers in order to work their way into mainstream English consciousness. It is an effort to mitigate to some small measure the differences in language and meaning and understanding between two different communities. A *tiendita* for example, is a small store by translation, but as I try to demonstrate in Chapter Three, it has a whole cultural function and meaning for Hispanic immigrants in the Southeastern U.S. To simply have “small store” in the text would not reveal what is behind the meaning of *tiendita*, besides the loss of the melodious and rhythmic sounds of Spanish for those who appreciate the esthetics of sounds in language. The use of Spanish is not an attempt to promote Spanglish, an aberration that most of us who are bilingual participate in who live in this country called the graveyard of languages (Stavans, 2003).

### *Hispanic or Latino?*

In a similar pattern of thought, I spent much time thinking about what to call people in the study who speak Spanish, generally proceed from countries south of the U.S., and live, whether temporarily or more permanently in the U.S. The choice was simple: I followed my rule of thumb stated in the previous paragraph—I allow the participants to define themselves. Several years ago after being back in the U.S, armed with a growing knowledge of Latino and Chicano literature on educational issues for Spanish-speaking immigrant children, I spent some time on the Texas-Mexico border on a research project. When I questioned participants about how they defined themselves, I was surprised that hardly any of them related to being a Chicano or a Latino. Some preferred to be called Mexicans, some Mexican-Americans, some preferred to be called Americans of Hispanic descent, and some simply “Americans.” There are historical and sociocultural reasons for the choices people make to define themselves, and certainly the conditions of the Texas-Mexico border are not the same as those of Latinos in New York or those who call themselves Chicanos or Latinos in southern California. The conditions in the Southeast vary significantly from those in more traditional receiving areas of Spanish-speaking immigrants in the U.S. While the term Latino serves useful purposes of identification and collectivity for a host of motivations, and is the prevalent term in related literature, in Galax,

when the people were allowed to speak for themselves, they overwhelmingly defined themselves differently.

*“Yo no me considero Latino(a), soy mexicano(a)”* (I do not consider myself Latino (male) or Latina (female), I am Mexican.), said at least two of the participants, in a response that is typical in the area. When speaking in normal conversation and not answering a direct question concerning identity, the terms *“hispano(a)”* (Hispanic) and *Mexicano(a)* permeate the language use of the participants and of most of the periphery people in the study. One student said she has gone on trips with *“grupos de hispanos, mexicanos, y moyos”* (with groups of Mexicans, Hispanics, and African Americans). In Galax, there are people from other Central and South American countries, but the vast majority are Mexicans or are children of Mexican immigrants.

When asked directly, most say they are Mexican, and identify themselves with a larger international community from the predominantly Spanish-speaking Americas as Hispanics, although some see themselves in that context as *“Latinoamericanos”*. Often, when asked closer, people reveal a further division based on states of origin, (e.g. oaxaqueño, poblano, chilango).

To conclude this discussion, due to the majority being Mexicans, I use that term frequently throughout the text, while generally use Hispanic to describe the greater population of Spanish-speaking people in the area. I believe this is the voice of the people for now, while recognizing that the newcomers continue to work out issues of identity and terms. The only exception being in the literature review on schools in Chapter One, the term Mexican is an important distinction due to the exceedingly high dropout rates among that category. I think an important point in this study is that Hispanic immigrants in the area are people living a different reality than the more heavily populated and traditional areas of Hispanic immigration. They need to be approached without stereotyping the realities and experiences of other people who live in other areas.

### Limitations

There are several limitations to this study that should be noted. By limiting the study to the community of Galax, located on the perimeter of Carroll County and Grayson County in Southwest Virginia, the applicability of the study to other settings may be subject to the unique factors I found in this community. Examples are the largely welcoming spirit that Hispanic immigrants found in Galax and that may contrast with a less-welcoming community even in surrounding counties. The efforts of school leaders and personnel to engage their new neighbors

and to reach out to native residents to embrace them may have contributed to the positive experience of immigration many members of both communities express, and may not be replicated in every community in the region. The experiences of the participants may not reflect those of other immigrants or native residents in other areas in or outside of Appalachia. Other limitations will be documented later in this study.

## CHAPTER TWO—MEXICO AT HOME IN APPALACHIA

### *Culture, Language and Identity of Transnationals in the Southern Appalachians*

In this chapter, I open with a vignette describing a first look at Galax, which includes meeting people that speak two languages. Referring liberally to personal experience, I introduce some of the particular challenges Hispanic immigrants face with a focus on language and identity. Then, I explore some of the literature related to schooling experiences for Hispanic immigrants.

### *Community Place*

Nestled in the eastern Appalachians, just west of the Blue Ridge Parkway in Southwest Virginia, within minutes of the intersection of two interstates, lies the picturesque town of Galax. With a population of just over 7,000, and sprinkled with dozens of predominantly Protestant churches, with meadows and heavily forested hills within and without the town limits, the town appears as a postcard of idyllic, small town U.S.A., the kind of place that has been left behind over the past half-century as the country continued to become centered around larger municipalities. For a visitor, it is easy to imagine the natural beauty of this place as it changes during four distinct seasons, and delve into nostalgia over a mystical time gone by, when the country was more rural, neighbors visited each other, families tended to stay together, and long-held values reigned over profiteering in a market society. The place is beautiful as a natural setting, and lends itself to mythologizing the past and the present, but it is the contemporary story playing out with real people to which I turn my attention.

Driving into town, looking beyond the natural beauty of the southern Appalachian landscape, the pick-up trucks, and chain restaurants, among the few pedestrians on the sidewalks I spot a dark-skinned male with distinct Mexican mestizo features walking as if with a sense of place and purpose. He appears to know where he is going, and confident of his steps, unlike the hesitancy and apparent confusion observed frequently with foreigners when place is unfamiliar. He is not in a hurry, nor is he stopping to peer into store windows. He seems to be strolling down the center of town, much as might any resident who has lived here all their lives. A few blocks further on Main Street, a slim young girl with dark attractive features does appear to be walking slowly, looking intently into storefronts, not as if she were shopping, but as if looking for

something or someone. So, its true, I say to myself, this town does seem to have a resident population of Hispanic immigrants.

I steer the Suzuki up around the schools at the crest of the hill to have a look, since I know I will be spending some interesting days there over the next year and a half. I notice worn living room furniture on the porches of several homes. Outside on an old chair sits a young Hispanic-looking male talking on a cell-phone. Later, in a local Mexican restaurant, my wife and I exchange greetings with the waitress, who hails from Nayarit, a small state along the Northwest coast of Mexico. Across from us arrive a Hispanic male speaking Mexican slang, together with a very light-skinned mother with three children who appear to have features of both adults. He speaks to her in Spanish, she answers in Spanish, but with a distinctive American English accent. The food is good to excellent, and more like the flavors I learned to love over 24 years living in Mexico than those of the typical “Mexican” restaurants that are found ubiquitously in the U.S. We have ordered from the special weekend menu-an obvious nuance made for natives and *conocedores* or connoisseurs of Mexican cuisine that proceeds from the interior of the country. My thesis seems to be gaining credibility-there does seem to be a resident and significant Mexican community located in this beautiful and small town in Southwest Virginia.

As we leave the restaurant, we are engaged in conversation by the cashiers, who inquire of our places of origin and former places of residence in Mexico. The girls tell us that they are also from Nayarit, and are sisters. I turn to the man behind us in line and ask him if he also is from Nayarit. He says with a smile that no, he is from Veracruz, the largest state on the Gulf Coast of Mexico. He explains he works in the tree farms nearby. We make brief, humorous comparisons between Veracruz and the winter weather in Appalachia, and I reflect on the joy of speaking Spanish. I am intoxicated by the simple pleasures of people-to-people communication in cultural codes, where little nuances reveal insider knowledge, intimacy with *los paisanos*-literally translated as countrymen, or fellow-countrymen, but in code means more: it means something like the “bro” among some African-Americans; intimate linguistic communication is stepping across the threshold of a neighbor’s opened door, it is similar to the half-ichthus sign in the dirt among the persecuted early church in Roman times; it is the handshake of the brotherhood; it is saying we are community. It is intimacy with the Mexican community after over nearly a quarter century that makes me nostalgic. A thousand memories of open doors and hearts, and sumptuous meals from Mexicali to Villahermosa, from Reynosa to Oaxaca, from

Guerrero to Veracruz have merged to make the me of the moment who rejoices to feel briefly “at home.” Standing in the check-out line in a Mexican restaurant in Galax, Virginia, five people—including one born here—whose existence has been lived primarily in the country to the south of the river called the Rio Grande in the U.S. and *el Rio Bravo* in Mexico, enjoy however superficially, however briefly, the sense of community. One river with two names seems to be a metaphor for immigrants, regardless of where we are from. As we leave, with warm wishes and goodbyes and come-back-soons, I pick up the second Spanish language newspaper I’ve collected in town today, and marvel at Mexico in Appalachia.

Outside the restaurant, as local residents merge with us, I put on my best Southern accent suddenly, in an effort to stretch community into the local context, and realize it’s not going to work. For many of the local residents, fluency in Spanish separates rather than unites one to the local brotherhood, or so it feels. I am the odd-man out, a “flatlander,” an “outsider,” different, not from here, despite the fact that I was born in Virginia, and have deep family roots here. My first true mentor grew up near Buffalo mountain—traditionally and mythically a place far back in stereotypical backwoods Appalachia, complete with moonshine, violence and frequent murders. My identification with the true foreigners makes me different. My wife, a native from the state of Guanajuato, Mexico and I switch codes, sometimes consciously, and other times unconsciously, depending on where we are, the need for privacy or identification, the need for blending, and simply the urgency of the moment. Comically, when our conversations become animated, we may appear like Rickie Ricardo in the *I Love Lucy* series, with sudden lapses into hyper-exchange in Spanish, L1 or first language for my wife, L2 for me. Besides my 24 years of living in Mexico, we have been married ten years, and were friends for years before that. Up until the last four years, our medium of communication was Spanish; since Patricia has been working in a bookstore, her dominant language has switched to English. She has progressed wonderfully, and speaks the English of the region with a near-native [southern] accent, with only a few words whose pronunciation along with a few grammatical fossilizations have proven to be very resistant to change.

### *Language and Identity for Hispanic Immigrants in Southwest Virginia*

We have a group of friends from Mexico and other Latin American countries with whom we enjoy community in the New River Valley. The language of the adults is always Spanish, with an occasional phrase in English, often followed by a translation in Spanish—the kind of

language use of terms or phrases learned in specific contexts within the local, English-speaking community, and generally employed for effect, rather than due to language deficiency in the primary language. Interestingly, when the children of these friends play together, the dominant language is English. Frequently, the children code-switch immediately and with no hesitation when their parents address them in Spanish. Sometimes, I observe that while the parent continues the exchange in Spanish, the children will answer in English. I think, sometimes, this is resistance on the part of the children, as the parents are concerned that the children not lose their native language while living in the U.S., and children naturally resist the imposition. At other times, there may simply be language issues where the children are using the most accessible code available to their conscious minds at the moment, the language of working memory. I suspect there are other more subtle issues at play sometimes as well: when the children speak English with very little or no Hispanic accent, and the parents have obvious flaws in pronunciation and/or vocabulary, it appears that the children are showing dominance to the adults. In some cases, I suspect there are issues of identity and acceptance, where the children need to be accepted in the context of the world they are living in, do not want to be seen as different, and thus are making a distinction between themselves and the parents.

Richard Rodriguez (1982) describes the painful journey from monolingualism into first bilingualism, and eventually into a new monolingualism in his autobiographical *Hunger for Memory*. The child of Mexican immigrants to California, Rodriguez describes the willful decision to leave the language of comfort, identity and intimacy as a school-age child, because he perceived the greater advantages of assimilating to the dominant culture and language, with a new identity. A poster child for assimilation advocates, his adult reflections on those growing years reveal the choice to ignore the warmth of his parents' overtures in their native language, to respond in English, and to eventually not respond at all as gain produced loss. Loss of home language and intimacy accompanied Rodriguez's success in the academic and literary world of the dominant culture. To see and hear Richard Rodriguez as a frequent essayist on PBS, is to see an indigenous face who masters a sophisticated vocabulary with a Californian accent in English, whose brief use of Spanish reveals language loss, lost accent, and always with pathos in the voice. He is a deeply sensitive man, still grieving apparently, haunted by themes of his past and present (Rodriguez, 1992, 2004). Hated by bilingual advocates, Rodriguez's experience warrants a closer look at the immigrant experience of gain and loss that occurs in schools. I think of place,

community, and language and how the changes and learning due to immigration impact the individual, the family, the community, and the place. For Rodriguez, as for millions of Hispanic immigrant children, school is the place where language and identity, learning, and conflict intersect. I now direct our attention to a consideration of issues that impact Hispanic immigrant children in schools in the U.S.

### *Hispanic Immigrant Children in U.S. Schools*

In this section, I discuss the significance of the numbers of Hispanic children, their performance in schools, and themes that are relative to the experiences of Hispanic immigrant children in schools in the U.S. There is a growing body of literature and research on issues of significance for educators, researchers, and policy-makers; some of it is contradictory, controversial, or highly politicized. I employ a poem by Mexican-American writer Ana Castillo to illustrate common themes that surface frequently related to schooling experiences for these children. I discuss the impact of the immigration experience, the sending community/country influence, the social world that must be negotiated by the immigrant child, both within and without the perimeters of the school buildings, the issues of language, the risks of dropout, and family issues that are transformed due to immigration. Identity—more than language—is arguably the single most significant factor facing Hispanic immigrant children in the U.S. Marginalization is the reality for many Mexican immigrant children.

#### *The Latinization of U.S. schools.*

The huge wave of Hispanic immigration during the decade of the 1990s is reflected in the 60 percent increase nationwide (U.S. Census, 2000). Many of the estimated 9.3 million undocumented immigrants are children (Passel, Capps, & Fix, 2004). Eight million Hispanic children or 17% of the total are currently enrolled in U.S. schools. In the West, 32% of all students enrolled are Hispanic, while nationwide, Hispanic children are now the largest minority in public schools (NCES, 2003; NCES, 2004). In the Southeast, Hispanics have filled the classrooms that were predominantly made up of a Black/White populace. Over two and a half million native Spanish speaking students are labeled as Limited English Proficient (LEP) nationwide (NCELA, 2000), and over three and a half million who speak Spanish at home, ages five to twenty-four, “speak English with difficulty” (NCES, 2003). Many live in segregated communities where the predominant language is Spanish, although with many variations,



making it difficult to practice English in authentic contexts outside of school, and most Hispanics attend highly segregated schools (NCES, 2003).

*The dropout crisis.*

A crisis exists due to the dropout rate of one in every three Hispanics nationwide; when the category is narrowed to Mexican immigrants, the dropout rate is 61.4%, or nearly two of every three (President's Advisory Commission on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans, 2003). Less than 22% of Mexican immigrants complete high school. While the quality of life of individuals and the families of dropouts may suffer risks of low-wage employment with little or no health coverage, other agencies such as federal, state and local communities are concerned about the cost to tax-payers along with the social costs of dropouts (President's Advisory Commission on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans, 2003). In some instances, the segregated communities that immigrants live in are rife with crime and violence, where even transportation to and from schools is fraught with risk (Suárez-Orozco, 2000).

Some react to these facts and figures by sending messages designed to pressure policy makers to put a stop to "illegal immigration," to arrest and deport the undocumented, to provide no health or education for children of the undocumented, such as Proposition 127 in California, to cease all bilingual education programs, in expressions that imitate the xenophobic intent if not the language common in the congressional debates in the 1920s (Hanson, 2003; Huntington, 2004). As researcher advocates for children, we need to look for underlying causes for the disappointing academic performance of many Hispanic immigrant students, and offer alternatives to incarceration, deportation and the accompanying risks of increased family separation. We must seek to understand what happens to cause children to have a decline in academic achievement over time. The following poem illustrates common themes expressed in much of the research literature concerning learning, language, and identity. I take liberty to emphasize those themes that are intimated in the text.

Red Wagons

In grammar school primers  
The red wagon  
was for children

pulled along  
 past lawns on a sunny day.  
 Father drove into  
 The driveway. "Look,  
 Father, look!"  
 Silly Sally pulled Tim  
 on the red wagon.

Out of school,  
 the red wagon carried  
 kerosene cans  
 to heat the flat.  
 Father pulled it to the gas  
 station  
 when he was home  
 and if there was money.

If not, children went to bed  
 In silly coats  
 silly socks; in the morning  
 were already dressed  
 for school.

Ana Castillo, (1958)

In her poem, *The Red Wagon*, Castillo (1958) represents two realities many Mexican immigrant children face: (1) the realities of learning to read and write English text in schools that is based on mainstream U.S. middle-class life, and (2) the realities of the world outside of school, in their neighborhoods and homes. Similar objects can have very different uses, other objects can be unattainable, and the activities of family members can vary drastically, depending on one's social or economic status. In this instance, the child found an object in the school text with which she could relate, although the red wagon was used for a different purpose than that she was accustomed. In the context of teaching and learning, she identifies the known, the red wagon, to relate to the new information, the new vocabulary. The text probably has an illustration that supported her identifying the object with which she was familiar, and that in her language would have been *la carreta*. With the assistance of the picture, she is learning new vocabulary by relating the new word in English to the known word in her prior knowledge base. We can appreciate her language development in writing and identify common developmental problems of learning English from a Spanish background through her choice of the preposition "on" (*en* in

Spanish, which can mean “in” or “on”) in the phrase “Silly Sally pulled Tim on the red wagon.” We may question the lack of a subject in the last phrase, “in the morning were already dressed for school” for similar reasons.

The Mexican immigrant child in the poem is learning to read text in English, and she is also learning to read about life for “Americans.” She is also learning an unstated learning objective: to compare her life with the lives of “American” children by the use of the symbol of the red wagon. She is learning that her lifestyle is different from “American” children her age. She is learning that *she* is different, that she is poor. In the interactive part of her class, she may be ashamed to share any information that might reveal just how different her life is, as illustrated by the knowledge of different uses people have for a red wagon. A common complaint by teachers of Hispanic immigrant children is that they “clam up.” This is ironic, as the child is often privy to more knowledge than her mainstream classmates. She knows her world and she is fast learning about the world of mainstream “Americans,” while the mainstream children may only know about their own ethos. In this simple poem, Castillo helps the reader see and feel from the perspective of the Mexican immigrant child what a learning experience can involve in a school in the U.S.

The picture the reader might create from the poem is one of a child who is learning to read and write in her second language, yet it is not a happy child we see. It is a child for whom reading and writing about a red wagon brings little cheer. It is a child who reflects upon the frequent absences of her father, and his lack of providing basic needs of shelter and warmth, and who does so by comparing her world with the world of her text from school. Her fluency with another new word, “silly,” is demonstrated by applying it to herself and her siblings through the clothes they wear to sleep in when there was no money to heat the dwelling, in a process kin to what Suárez-Orozco (2001) calls “social mirroring,” which we will discuss shortly. The new word is meaningful to her, and judging by her personal applications, seems to be internalized. An educator might be tempted to be satisfied that a learning objective is accomplished as vocabulary is developing. Yet, a closer look reveals that the child is pained through the learning process by the discovery of difference. The pain that comes with the awareness of difference may lead the immigrant child to eventually withdraw from her educational experience.

Research indicates that a majority of Hispanic immigrant children enter U.S. schools with high expectations and initially make good progress, but gradually become discouraged for many

of the reasons that are hinted at in *The Red Wagon*. Over time their academic performance declines and many eventually dropout of school (Suárez-Orozco, 2001; Trueba, 1999). “The immigrant childrens’ learning ability and social skills *deteriorate* [italics mine] the longer they are exposed to American society’s alienating environments” (Trueba, 1999, p. 135). When the child or the child’s parents are undocumented, children express fear of arrest or family separation, adding an additional stress factor to the immigrant experience (Suárez-Orozco, 2000).

*The Harvard immigration projects.*

C. Suárez-Orozco and M. Suárez-Orozco (2001) are senior researchers in The Harvard Immigration Projects, which includes the Longitudinal Immigrant Student Adaptation Study (LISA), a five-year interdisciplinary study that began in 1997. LISA followed 400 recently arrived immigrant children from ages nine to fourteen in more than fifty schools in the areas of Boston and San Francisco (C. Suárez-Orozco & M. Suárez-Orozco, 2004). LISA focuses on the immigrant experience from the home country, reasons for immigrating, the gains and losses faced, and the stresses placed upon children and families. LISA involved thirty research assistants doing ethnographic field work, using a variety of methods including structured interviews with students, parents, and teachers; observations, school documents, and questionnaires for teachers. The study focuses on schools, as the first place “systematic contact with the new culture transpires,” and determines that a child’s adaptation to school “is a significant predictor of a child’s future well-being and contributions to society” (Suárez-Orozco, 2001, p.3).

*Gains and losses for immigrants.*

While immigrants’ experience of crossing borders and reasons for immigration vary widely, all immigrations are stressful experiences with gains in the host country, as well as losses that may not be apparent (Suarez-Orozco, 2000). Often, an immigrant experiences violence in the sending country, violence or the threat of violence in the trajectory of crossing the border into the U.S., and arrives to engage an ethos of violence in the receiving communities and schools. Fear of violence, including psychological violence is reported in the LISA study as common experiences of immigrant children (Suarez-Orozco, 2000). There are gains when immigrants achieve political, religious and economic freedom when arriving to the U.S., and there are losses that come with leaving behind country; loss of cultural support systems, loss of status, family,

and often loss of language. Traditional family roles are often reversed, as children typically learn language and culture codes quickly, and become cultural mediators, and even make decisions for parents. Over time, combined with peer knowledge, the traditional authority of parents as practiced in the home countries is eroded, creating stress for children and parents. Parents worry that their children are becoming too American, while pushing them to excel in school (Suárez-Orozco, 2001). Children live two lives, one at home where parents wish to conserve the old traditions and where children must help interpret life in the new country, and then wrestle with adapting or assimilating into the social worlds of the schools they attend and the neighborhoods where they live. They must make a choice, to become like their peers, or to cling to their roots as expressed through their parents (Suárez-Orozco, 2001).

*Generational frames of reference.*

There is a difference of reference between generations of immigrants as well. While parents tend to compare present circumstances in the U.S. with the home country, children tend to make comparisons with their lives in the new country, as expressed in *The Red Wagon*. For parents, the economy and living conditions may appear to be much better in the U.S. as compared to their former lives, while children may compare their relative poverty in the U.S. with mainstream, white middle-class (Suárez-Orozco, 2001). The connection with sending communities continues to be strong for many of the more recent Mexican immigrants, and may include periodical visits or sojourns, which tend to reinforce references based on the community of origin, at least for adults.

*Predictors of success.*

Suárez-Orozco (2001) identifies predictors of successful immigration to the U.S. as: human capital (education and economy in country of origin) and social capital (networks and connections) that contribute to the successful immigration experience in the U.S. Race, color, language and country of origin are other factors that are predictors of academic success. The receptivity or hostility of the receiving community to the immigrants is another significant factor in successful assimilation (Suarez-Orozco, 2000). 80% of the new American immigrants are brown or black, and for many of them, skin color is a social issue for which they have little precedence. Racism in schools and communities is one of the most common factors that affect successful immigration. Dark skinned, Spanish-speaking Mexican children from backgrounds of

poverty and parents with less than high school education are all predictors for negative adaptation to schools. They are likely to live in segregated communities and are likely to attend schools that are marginal, if not failing, located in neighborhoods with high crime rates and gang related activities. The LISA study determined that there are two basic tracks for these children: the few who become overachievers despite the circumstances, and the over represented underachievers (Suarez-Orozco, 2001, p. 29).

*Social mirroring and identity.*

“Social mirroring” is a factor that plays strongly in the construction of identity for immigrant children in schools according to Suarez-Orozco (2001, pp 96-101). Social mirroring refers to the social messages that the dominant culture sends to the immigrant as to how they are viewed and received. Schools and society reflect messages to the immigrant, i.e. You are: smart/dumb, speak well/ poorly, honest/dishonest, likely to become a criminal; this may occur by tracking for vocational study or college prep. In the LISA study, Mexican immigrant children responded to the sentence, “Most Americans think Mexicans are...” with a 75% negative perception (p. 97). Teacher beliefs and treatment of children are powerful messages for children, and often teachers are unaware of negative stereotyping or racism that influences their classroom practice and assigning of grades (Trueba, 1999). Children are profoundly affected by these perceptions, and they respond to these social messages by accepting them, rejecting in active or passive ways, and in so doing, construct their identities (Suarez-Orozco, 2001). Identity is perhaps the greatest factor facing immigrant children, and where gain and loss intersect.

*The double burden on immigrant youth.*

The theme of identity was central to the 2003 conference “Working with Immigrant Youth: Successes and Challenges” at Hunter College. Seecharran (2003) spoke of the “double-burden” that immigrant youth face beyond the normal traumas and stresses that youth commonly experience in the adolescent years in every society. Along with the complexities of encountering peer pressure at schools in the receiving communities, at home immigrant youth often become the cultural mediators for parents, and are pressured to preserve traditional culture from the sending countries, and to not be like youth in the U.S. Schools are seen as “pressure centers, where the normal need for acceptance (intrinsic pressure) in the adopted country pressures immigrant youth to adopt dress styles, music preferences and language that is “hip” or common

among youth in the U.S. (external pressures). “ABC” describes the experience of many children of immigrant parents who are “American Born and Confused” (Seecharan). The confusion is over identity.

Solutions offered are schools that are designed to meet the needs of immigrant children, including culturally appropriate pedagogy, effective English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction, and knowledgeable and sympathetic staff (Greenberg, 2003; Schnur, 2003; Villar, 2003) and the need to create space where immigrant youth can be themselves, or who they decide to be on any given day. Speakers spoke from personal experience of the need to “try out” different identities as youth work out issues of identity (Seecharan, 2003). Other issues of importance for immigrant youth are issues of human rights, gender issues, and the need for assistance in “navigating the system” of transferring from school to school over the course of the public school career. Transitioning from middle school, usually located in the local Mexican community, to the high school is described as the most serious problem faced by children of immigrants on the West Coast in the LISA study (Suarez-Orozco, 2001). Fox (2003) and Patel (2003) spoke of the need for advocacy work due to the fact that schools under pressure to have passing marks on standardized tests pressure parents to sign documents in English that they may not understand, and that effectively track students out of public schools and into GED or other vocational programs (Patel, 2003). Students are lost in transition in the receiving country by receiving a message from schools that say effectively, “you don’t belong here.” Finally, youth identify as “the most painful issue” the angst of being undocumented (Fox, 2003).

#### *Identity gains and losses.*

Identify is a main theme in the Rodriguez (1982) narrative as he describes his journey as a native Spanish-speaking second-generation Mexican-American child to the pinnacle of Western literary education. The journey examines the private at-home intimacy of Spanish language and culture juxtaposed with public alienation in the “gringo” (Anglo-American) English dominant world. Rodriguez reflects on the loss of home intimacy, heritage and even self while remaking self through education. As he endeavors to master the English language and pursues educational goals while being supported by his family, Rodriguez experiences the loss of dialogue and intimacy at home even while public acceptance grows due to his exceptional performance in school. This atypical testimony of an overachiever reveals the pain frequently experienced through assimilation gains and cultural losses for many Hispanic immigrant

children, most of whom do not share the same academic success of Rodriguez. Language themes abound in the narrative, as Rodriguez opens the curtain to the frequent shame experienced by immigrant English Language Learners (ELL) over a variety of linguistic factors, invisible to those not sharing a similar experience. An opponent of bilingual education, Rodriguez is both a champion of the assimilationists typified by the “English Only” proponents, and ironically a victim of his own success, as seen by his grieving over cultural losses, including estrangement from his family (Rodriguez, 1982, 1992).

*Marginalization.*

Trueba (1999) is concerned with the issue of marginalization for Mexican immigrant children. Being uprooted, poverty and isolation are associated with marginalization. For the Mexican immigrant, the variety of Spanish from the sending community may not be present among people with whom they need to communicate, and there may be a sense of loss of cultural support, and anxiety of expected appropriate behavior in the receiving community and schools. Often, immigrant labor is poorly paid, and employment is unstable; there are often pressures from the sending community to send money back to Mexico, and debts owed to the coyotes or human traffickers—all factors that combine to create anxiety over economics. For many of Mexico’s poor, poverty in the sending community is transferred to poverty in the receiving community, and malnutrition is not uncommon for immigrant children. Often, in dire circumstances, immigrants are unaware of, or are reluctant to recur to social services, due to fears related to being undocumented. Segregated communities may foment conditions unfavorable to social advancement: promote family disintegration and vandalism, drug trafficking and drug abuse. Hispanic immigrants may feel unwelcome at school, rejected by mainstream school culture. Resistance to these kinds of oppression often involves rejection of school, and teachers. Eventual school dropout and gang involvement are often associated with similar conditions related to marginalization. Efforts of parents to counteract the negative influences common in the receiving communities in the U.S. often includes sending youths back to the home communities in Mexico (Trueba, 1999; Zou, & Trueba, 1998).

Carger (1996), in an ethnographic study over several years, describes the experiences and perceptions of an Hispanic immigrant adolescent in Chicago, and those of his family. Carger begins as a teacher/researcher, and becomes an advocate for Alejandro Juarez, who struggles with a learning disability, language and cultural barriers, peer pressure, and schools that are



inadequately staffed and prepared to meet the needs of students like Alejandro. This study also shows the bewilderment of parents of immigrant children as they face the complexities of schools in the U.S., and the need for advocates who can be cultural mediators, interpreting and guiding newcomers through the nation's academies. The epilogue does not present the prediction of a successful academic outcome for Alejandro, despite the years of tutoring, personal and family support, and advocacy proffered by Carger. The Carger study is a journey of an educator and researcher into the world of Hispanic immigrants in Chicago schools, and reveals how easily immigrant children can fall through the gaps of our present educational system.

*Contrasting cultural beliefs and values.*

Valdés (1996) began an ethnographic study near the Mexican California border to examine family environment and how the nexus of bilingual and biliteracy development in Mexican immigrant children and communities affected school performance. The Valdés three year study was originally focused on language and literacy development in 10 children. Valdés found more significant, however, that teachers' perceptions of Mexican immigrants become misconceptions and influence how they relate to students and their parents. For example, one teacher's perception was that parents were not very concerned about their children's education because of lack of communication with the teacher (p.4-5), a complaint often observed in teachers of Mexican immigrants. Often, parents work schedules that do not permit them to attend school functions. Immigrant parents' lack of confidence in English, their cultural and educational backgrounds, combined with their shyness and insecurity in schools, are additional factors that are misconstrued by teachers as lack of involvement. Cultural misunderstandings between parents, teachers, and students were found to contribute to lack of academic "success" of Mexican immigrant children.

*Education or la educación.*

Belief about life, meaning, values, and definitions of success as defined by two very different cultures lead to children being perceived as unmotivated, and to poor academic performance as defined by the discourse of power. Different assumptions by both teachers and schools on one hand, and parents and children on the other, lead to communication disconnect. "Good" children and students have *educación*, defined by Mexican immigrants in ways that are more attitudinal and behavioral than the academic achievement as demonstrated by high scores

on tests. Demonstrating *respeto*, being respectful in relationships with teachers and classmates, being kind and caring are elements of people with *una buena educación*, good upbringing. In this way, Valdés demonstrates how the Spanish word for education, *la educación*, means something much broader than the translation of the word in English (Valdés, 1996, p., 125). The hopes and dreams of the 10 mothers of these children are not so much for advanced degrees, but rather that their children maintain honest employment. Most importantly, however, is that their children grow to be responsible, loyal adults who keep deeply held family and cultural truths alive, and in these ways demonstrate *la buena educación*. These are the hopes that are passed on to their children who enter U.S. schools where different expectations await them.

*Discontinuity from home to school.*

Delgado-Gaitán (1987) studied discontinuity as it affects Mexican immigrant children and their teachers in classroom interactions. She observed children at recess, around their homes, at play and was a participant observer in classrooms in a community in California. Three areas of discontinuity analyzed were (1) collectivity-competitiveness, (2) authoritarian-egalitarian, and (3) multidimensional-unidimensional. When children were at home, they typically competed amongst themselves in games, and negotiated duties for assigned chores, organizing themselves in collective activities. Knowledge is shared even during the competition of games. While in school, however, children were generally required to work alone, and were not encouraged to share knowledge or negotiate meanings in tasks. The researcher observed that the children generally found ways to share answers amongst themselves, including when the teacher was not aware, even though the practice was discouraged. These collectivizing habits from home sometimes lead to being sanctioned at school for “copying” or worse, for “cheating” (Delgado-Gaitán, 1987, pp., 342-344).

The authoritarian-egalitarian patterns observed at home revealed the respect children demonstrate for their parents, their demands and requests, but within a pattern of negotiation with parents and siblings. Parental authority was directive, but flexible at home, while at school, the pattern observed for the use of authority was much more controlling, rigid, demanding (Delgado-Gaitán, pp., 348-349).

Delgado-Gaitán observed how Mexican children explored their worlds outside of schools, collectively solved problems, making use of their imagination, creativity, language and people skills, and resourcefulness. In contrast, the skills required of the children in schools were

mostly reading and writing, while they were taught to be silent (pp., 351-356). This ethnographic study demonstrates the risk of discontinuity for Mexican children who arrive at schools in the U.S. with backgrounds rich in skills for learning, and who may be disoriented, and become frustrated or worse through the culturally insensitive approach to learning as observed in this school.

Delgado-Gaitán & Trueba (1991) critically examined the role of culture and socialization between schools and home among immigrants in a community in California. The researchers observed behavior at home, play, and in classroom activities, and recorded interviews with participants. Socialization in the home involved authoritarian roles for parents assigning tasks, but also empowered children to negotiate the implementing of those tasks. The researchers observed the collectivity pattern of cooperation among siblings, play patterns, and children's respect for parental authority at home. Children often demonstrated confusion over the routines expected at school, and over the behavioral marks they received from teachers. Breaking rules based on Anglo values (white mainstream U.S.) were commonly observed, with resulting consequences and frustration and anger in the children. Other factors found that affected the attendance, tardiness, and cleanliness of students included the long hours parents work, lack of resources, and late night schedules (Delgado-Gaitán & Trueba, 1991).

The Delgado-Gaitán study showed that the community or small group activities, including negotiations and task-sharing at home, were a contrast with the focus on individual work at school. Students demonstrated superior language use and cognitive skills at home and in their communities than at school. Students did more listening than communicating in the classrooms. Schools worked through an assimilationist approach, focused on rapid acculturation, that included English and the values of the dominant culture. Delgado-Gaitán & Trueba (1991) advocate for research based educational reform that focuses on the ethos of classrooms, including those practices that exclude the knowledge and skills immigrant children bring to school and that result in isolation. They fault the lack of acceptance in schools for the different timetables individual learners require to adapt to schools and curriculum and to become fluent in English.

*Schools welcome and unwelcome immigrants.*

Gitlin, Buendía, Crosland, and Doumbia (2003) examined how a middle school sent contradictory messages of welcome and unwelcome to immigrants from Asia, Bosnia and

Mexico. Four researchers made 20 observations each of an ESL classroom, made formal interviews with administrators, parents, teachers, and formal and informal interviews with students, and performed a rich description of the community using critical theory and postmodern frameworks. The researchers found historical racism that affected the community's approach to an influx of new immigrants. The ESL program was viewed as a problem to be unloaded, and administrators viewed assimilation policies and practices as the solution. While the school provided welcoming messages by providing ESL classes, multicultural assemblies and inclusion practices, the researchers found hidden messages that tended to isolate and marginalize immigrant students in school assemblies, the lunchroom, the bus program, and the discipline policies. While those programs appeared to meet the needs of the immigrant students, they isolated or highlighted *otherness*, the differences in culture and language. The bus program was designed to get the immigrants to school as close to the bell as possible and to get them off the premises within five minutes of the end of school, with the effect of limiting those students' extra curricular activities (Gitlin et al, 2003).

White parents were concerned with the risk of declining school performance and community image due to the influx of immigrants. Immigrant students perceived that often school personnel only interacted with them on matters of discipline, and that mainstream students were concerned for their safety, and of the potential of violence as related to immigrants. While white parents pressure school officials with their concerns related to the immigrants, the parents of immigrants tended to accept conditions graciously, comparing schools between the old country and the new, and to be reticent to question any practice or policy. Structural racism in the community peeked through the welcoming messages that this school overtly demonstrated, with the effect of segregating, marginalizing and providing much less than adequate education for the immigrants (Gitlin, et al, 2003).

#### *Subtractive schooling.*

Valenzuela (1999), in a three-year study of a large urban high school in Houston, examined how structural policies and practices in this school aimed at divesting Mexican descent youth of their *Mexicanidad*, their "Mexicanness," through what she calls subtractive schooling. Through extensive observations, interviews, and data analysis, the researcher found that the school was organized both formally and informally in ways that "fracture students cultural and ethnic identities, creating social, linguistic and cultural divisions among the students and between

the students and staff” (p. 5). For the immigrant students, teachers fail to build meaningful relationships with students, and students feel alienated from teachers, and both teachers and students perceive each other to be “uncaring.” As found in other contexts (Suarez-Orozco, 2001), second generation students of Mexican descent perform below the newly arrived immigrants. This is due, according to Valenzuela, to the process of subtractive schooling, or a systematic undervaluing of things Mexican (p. 19).

Teachers expect Mexican students to be quiet, respectful, not to question authority, and to work hard, all traits that the newer immigrants generally demonstrate, and to which traits teachers respond positively. Poor school conditions and devaluing Mexicanness are not perceived by the newer immigrants, who may tend to see the temporary improvement in economic conditions as contrasted with the conditions left behind in Mexico, as reason to work hard. The second generation, however, has often lost most of their parents’ language without mastering standardized English, and have been institutionally instructed that things Mexican are inferior to the dominant U.S. culture and language. Subtractive assimilation attempts to divest students of their native culture and language, indicating by practice and policy that the way to get ahead in the U.S. is to become like mainstream, i.e. white values and language. Second generation students may opt to resist the dominant society that has disenfranchised them, and to do so in ways that include alternative behavior patterns, language constructs, dress, gang involvement, and substance abuse. They may choose to resist schooling by not working docilely with teachers or on academics in order to not “act white.” Teachers respond to students who display these characteristics by saying that students don’t care (Valenzuela, 1999).

The result of subtractive schooling manifests itself in animosity between members of similar cultural, social, and linguistic backgrounds. Newer immigrants do not want to associate with the second or third generation Mexicans, as they are too “*Americanizados*,” (Americanized), while the second generation sees the newly arrived as uncool, embarrassing, for those cultural traits with which they do not wish to associate, the latter being a learned attitude from school experience (p. 19). Forcing assimilationist pedagogy upon immigrants, while dismissing things Mexican, including historical, cultural and linguistic background, effectively robs immigrants over time of their cultural and linguistic roots, and sets the table for increased segregation and marginalization of Mexican immigrant children and their descendents (Valenzuela, 1999).

*Transnational [peer] messages.*

Brittain (2002) examined the transnational messages Chinese and Mexican immigrant children share amongst themselves and how those messages impact attitudes and behaviors that may either support or marginalize school experience and academic performance (p., 233). The researcher used a mixed methods approach, including ethnographic open-ended interviewing, an interpretive approach, grounded theory, and large samples (152 informants), gathering data over five years. The researcher built her study on Portes' (1995) concept of "segmented assimilation," that is there are three patterns of assimilation possible for immigrants: (1) immigrants acculturate and assimilate to mainstream social life [the white, middle class]; (2) assimilate into the underclass, where they experience economic disadvantages, and (3) assimilate into immigrant communities as a source of economic, social and cultural capital. *Vulnerabilities and resources* in the receiving community affect the patterns of assimilation for immigrants. Vulnerabilities include color, location, and absence of mobility ladders (Brittain, 2002, p. 4). She also appropriated Portes' (1996) concept of "transnational social spaces," the idea that modern immigrants create social spaces that allow them to establish and maintain productive ties between country of origin and the receiving country. They exchange economic, social and cultural capital in these spaces.

The study demonstrated that most immigrant children heard messages prior to immigration and continued to hear messages as they socialized with co-national peers in school. The study showed that some of the major themes that children constructed over time reproduced the transnational messages' conceptualizations of American schools. Important implications in the findings relates to how these messages reflect vulnerability and resources in the receiving community and school experiences. Three major *resources* in the transnational messages among Mexican immigrant children are: (1) appreciation of having co-nationals in the school who provide support and social comfort; (2) free services and materials provided in the U.S. school that can contribute to the lowering of the cost of education, and (3) nice and caring teachers.

Students found that co-national peers were a source of guidance and information, easy to relate to, helped them feel more comfortable, and made the school seem a more familiar environment (Brittain, 2002, p. 236). Having transnational peers helped with becoming acquainted with school and with identifying appropriate classroom behaviors, language and culture; the children created a *transnational kinship group* (p. 237), where information and

support was exchanged. Where schools in Mexico have costs for everything from school uniforms, fees for books, services and even tests, the free education in public schools and the free meals were resources in the receiving communities. Over time, there were mixed views of teachers, although initially, teachers were seen as nice and caring, as “adults that care for them” (p. 238).

Three vulnerabilities for Mexican immigrant children in transnational messages are: (1) negative perceptions of peers that reproduce negative racial attitudes towards other student groups in the school and threaten children’s perception of safety in the school (gangs), (2) fewer academic demands that translate into low-quality education and dissolution of aspirations to achieve an education in the U.S., and (3) negative perceptions toward English language acquisition that promotes frustration towards the process.

Females expressed concern about gangs, especially toward African-American peers. These messages encouraged avoidance rather than integration, specifically to avoid contact with *Cholos* (Mexican gang members) and with African-Americans. Other messages included negative perceptions about the quality of education in U.S. schools, and included the feeling that they were not learning anything new in schools, that the basic instruction was centered on subjects they had already studied in Mexico. Transnational messages about English language acquisition involved the difficulty of learning English. Brittain (2002) concluded that most immigrant children communicate positive messages about U.S. schools, and that although perceived as “nice,” teachers may be unprepared, as compared to schools in the students’ home country.

### *Mexican dropout.*

Concerned over the high dropout rate of Mexican descent students, Mitchell (1998) studied 10 female Latina students from their freshman year until becoming high school graduates (five high achievers) or dropouts (five low achievers) in a South Texas border high school. She examined ways that students devise to achieve academic success or failure, and if these strategies could be attributed more to external or internal factors based on the assumption of a “reciprocal, dynamic relationship between humans and the social world of which they are a part.” (Mitchell, viii) The five “high achievers” passed the Texas Education Assessment (TEAMS) test and the five “low achievers” failed TEAMS. She used ethnographic methods including: observations of classroom behavior: preparedness, attentiveness, on-task behavior, and interactions with

teachers. She conducted informal interviews with individual students, peer groups, parents, and school officials. The tape-recorded and videotaped interviews focused on themes and issues perceived as important by the girls in the study.

The researcher observed a teacher with all of the components for lesson plans filled out, and the structure of the lesson cycle mastered, but that not all students were learning, and determined that: “The relationships between teacher-student, student-student, school-student were lacking” (Mitchell, 1998, p.170). She concludes that “school failure is reflexive, something the student does and something the school does” (p.12). The researcher sees individual action interrelated with family culture background and school environment as the locus of causes of failure or success, and cites the need for developing learning communities (p. 175).

Trueba (1988) analyzed a ten-week dropout prevention program for 100 junior high school students from minority and low-income backgrounds. Among the surprising factors was the role of tutors and counselors in the resocialization of students at risk in developing caring relationships that enabled youth to overcome “degrading experiences” suffered in schools. School representatives demonstrated racist attitudes and behaviors that resulted in degrading incidents for minority students, including frequent messages that “you don’t belong here.” As a reaction to the degrading experiences, minorities search for support groups among peers, who reinforce negative attitudes and perceptions, and lack of self esteem. The lack of self-esteem prevents minorities from entering into the Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky, 2002), and establishing learning relationships with experts. Minorities perform poorly on tasks and assessments as a result (Trueba, 1988, p. 209). The Dropout Prevention Program demonstrated that minorities respond positively to caring relationships with tutors, counselors and professors, can become resocialized to schools, and can perform “outstanding[ly]” in academic classes (p. 207). “California and Texas are the focus of intense Mexican immigration, a population that is now more than ever segregated and neglected. As a consequence, Mexicans become rapidly marginalized and show their enduringly high dropout rates.” (Trueba, 1999, p. 134).

#### *Dominant Culture’s Ultimate Rejection.*

One of the more serious social issues still largely ignored in U.S. media and research is what happens to immigrant youth who are deported, reportedly to be several thousand a year (The Economist, 2004). The dominant culture’s ultimate rejection is deportation. For youth, this frequently occurs due to criminal activity or gang involvement, what Trueba (1999), Suarez-



Orozco (2001) identify as resistance responses to rejection in schools. Many of these youth have been partially, if not largely divested of their cultural and linguistic roots, only to be suddenly incarcerated and shipped back to the countries of their origin. Central America now has a gang problem, which has been exported from America (Stevenson, 2003). Fierce response to gang activity in Honduras has resulted in incarceration of hundreds and even deportation from that country. Now, it is reported that some of these gangs operate from the Guatemalan border, through the Gulf state of Veracruz, and have made their way back to the U.S. border cities, following known immigrant paths. The formerly Los Angeles based *Mara Salvatrucha* is accused of some of the most violent assaults on new immigrants coming from Central America into the U.S. (Getty, 2004; Heredia, 2004; Stevenson, 2003; The Economist, 2004).

### Conclusion

In this section, I have discussed the changing demographic component of U.S. schools due to immigration, and specifically by the numbers of immigrant children from Mexico, along with the alarming high rate of dropout among this group. Figure 1 is a concept map with some main themes discussed. The predictors of success in schools include: social capital in the home country (C1), race, color, language, and country of origin. There are initial high expectations for academic achievement when students enter schools in the U.S. Schools may be the first encounter with the new culture for immigrant children. Neighborhoods that children live in and have to have to navigate due to school location affect success. Other factors students encounter in schools that impact success are: transnational messages, school demographics, marginalization, and risk of gang involvement. During the school years, while parents generally refer to the home country as a frame of reference for measuring gains or losses, immigrant children may tend to base their judgments on the quality of life by comparing with the receiving country (U.S.).

The impact of the immigration experience involves obvious gains, but also not as apparent, are the losses experienced in the U.S. by immigrant children. Not the least of those traumatic experiences includes changing roles for parents and children. Confusing and humiliating learning experiences in schools and classrooms, and social mirroring impact the construction of identity from schools, while contrasting values and messages await immigrants at home (Suarez-Orozco, 2001). Although many schools make efforts to welcome immigrant students, often there are structural barriers that are assimilationist and racist in nature, whether

known or unknown by the perpetrators, and that tend to divest students of cultural wealth, identity, and self esteem in subtractive schooling (Gitlan, et al, 2003; Valenzuela, 1999). Hispanic parents may transmit educational expectations to students that are different than expectations and goals their children encounter at school, where often there is no cultural mediator (Delgado-Gaitan, 1993). Cultural values and beliefs conflict at the nexus of home and school in the lives of immigrant children. Immigrant students tend to reinforce attitudes and behaviors among peers (Brittain, 2002). Predictors for academic success indicate the odds are stacked heavily in favor of dropout due to low social capital for the majority of Mexican immigrants (Suarez-Orozco, 2001; Trueba, 1999). While a small percentage of these immigrants are overachievers such as Rodriguez (1982), the majority of them are falling through the cracks in U.S. schools and communities. Other factors such as marginalization, and higher vulnerabilities in the receiving communities contribute to academic failure (Suarez-Orozco, 2001; Trueba, 1999; Valenzuela, 1999). The fruits of marginalization commonly lead to resistance towards teachers, schools, potential dropout, gang cultures and one more terrible consequence: deportation.

Now that I have considered factors that affect Hispanic immigrant children in their new habitats in their communities and schools, I turn my attention to the receiving community for this study. Just as the Hispanic immigrants for this study do not come from a void, so they arrived to a very special town in Appalachia.

1. Predictors of success
2. Expectations before entering schools
3. Factors influencing school experience
4. Patterns of behavior
5. Future performance

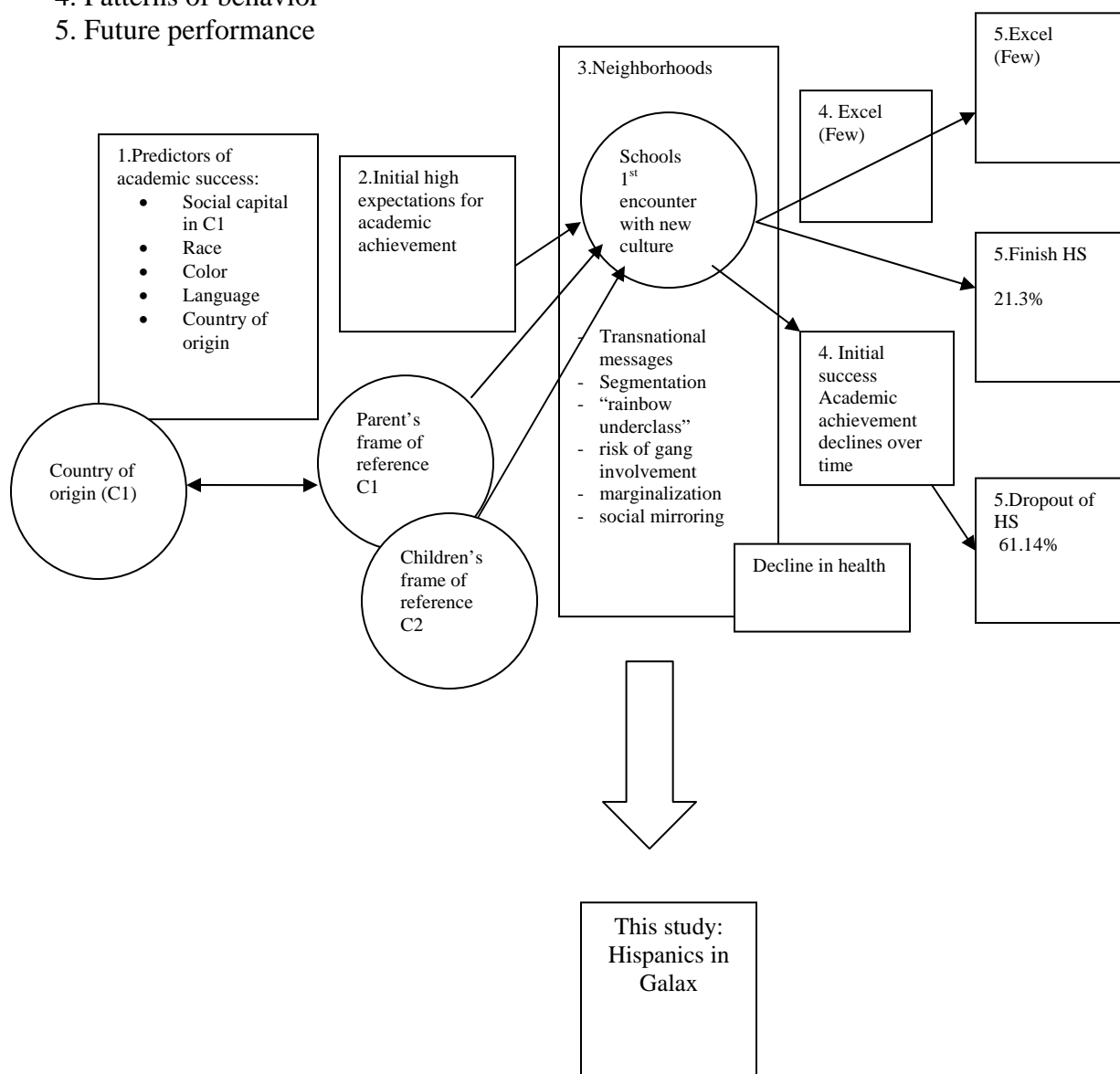


Figure 1. Mexican immigrant children in U.S. schools.

## CHAPTER THREE—APPALACHIAN COMMUNITY

### Galax- A Community Experiencing Change in Appalachia

In this chapter, divided into two parts, I open by providing some background information on Galax and the local area, considering geographical, historical and cultural factors, including ways of looking at local people. I take some liberty to speculate on the possible impacts of the first Europeans to enter the region on the ecology and peoples of Appalachia—the Spaniards—since they are culturally related to the Hispanic immigrants who appear over 400 years later. The second part of the chapter begins by an introduction to daily life in Galax as seen largely from a local family. The Truitts enable us to see through local residents’ perspectives the changes that have occurred in town due to immigration, the concerns mainstream families have over changes and an uncertain future for Galax. I endeavor to answer the first research question related to what we can learn from the local residents about the changes and impact on their lives and town through immigration. We see a town, overwhelmingly white, that is very accommodating to immigrants, with many people active in making the newcomers welcome and comfortable, but also see examples of discrimination and racism. I consider how worker class conflict is affecting both natives and immigrants as two cultures interact. Finally, I attempt to summarize the challenges facing the residents today and as they look toward an uncertain tomorrow.

#### *Part One-The Land and the People*

Located just west of the Blue Ridge Mountains at an elevation of 2,382 feet, Galax shares borders with the counties of Carroll and Grayson in southwest Virginia. The oldest river in the U.S., the New River, broadens just south of town, and continues flowing in a northwesterly direction. The tallest mountain in Virginia, Mount Rogers at 5729 feet lies a short distance to the Southwest, along with other peaks over 5,000 feet. The town of Galax takes its name from a native plant of the Appalachians of the same name. Blessed with ample rainfall and four distinct seasons, the natural setting seems complimentary with that of the Galax plant, which abounds in forested areas of the region. The plant is used in floral arrangements and reportedly as a medicinal herb. The city is located 82 miles southwest of Roanoke, Virginia and 100 miles east of Bristol, Virginia. Average rainfall is 46.8 inches. In 1904, the Norfolk & Western Railway constructed the line from Cliffside, and the last train to leave Galax departed in 1985. Founded in 1906, the town is currently preparing for its centennial celebration. Originally called Cairo, and

later Bonaparte, the town was renamed, according to local oral history, after an official with the Norfolk and Southern Railway Company saw a load of Galax leaves waiting to be loaded for shipping to New York, and remarked that the town ought to be called Galax. The town has a population of 7,000 and is eight square miles in size. The New River Trail State Park was developed from the railroad bed of the old Norfolk and Southern Railway and currently serves over 1 million visitors annually. The annual Old Fiddler's Convention lasts 6 days and attracts over 40,000 visitors (<http://www.galaxcentennial.com/galaxfacts.shtml>). The town is proud of its Blue Grass musical heritage and many of the young people continue to learn to play in the old traditions.

Local descriptions of the land tend to sound like tourist brochures.

At the time of the settlements, the land was covered by a virgin forest. There were doubtless a few clearings occasioned by fire, but for the most part, hill and hollow were covered with **ancient** trees. Some of the trees were **veritable monsters**, centuries old. Probably some of the white oaks were **so large that** they could not be cut down with any tool a man could carry into the county. There were chestnuts, walnuts, and hickories, all of which provided a **handsome living** for the **swarms of squirrels** which lived in **every** hollow. The oaks, maples, and poplars were **massive**, while the pines, also **huge**, were not as numerous as in recent times simply because the ancient hardwoods had preempted much of the ground. The county has always been **well watered**; almost any tract of a hundred acres was apt to have **a half dozen springheads**, and **all the water was pure**. The native **fish** were in the streams, **just for the taking**.....After the trees were cut, the land was rich. Centuries of rotting leaves and limbs had created a soil that would produce **tremendous** garden crops; moreover the **richness was not confined** to the bottom land, but extended to the hilltops as well (Alderman, 1985, pp. 1-2 [my highlights]).

### *People*

Archaeological work in the area indicates that the first human activity began around 9500 BC and was transient. Excavations at Daugherty's Cave in Russell County uncovered ten stratigraphic zones that reveal changing cultural practices over 11,000 years, from migratory hunters to more sedentary and complex cultural patterns (Barber & Hubbard, 1997). Other studies of rock shelters in Wise County also indicate transient base camps along with more complex base camps from Early Archaic times (8500-6500 BC), with the most frequent use in

the Late Woodland Period (AD-1000 - AD-1650) (Barber & Hubbard, 1997). Hundreds of potsherds were recovered at Daugherty's Cave and included Late Woodland ceramics, faunal remains of deer, black bear, elk, other small mammals, along with corn, nuts and other food sources that indicate cultural practices of different periods.

The first known Europeans to visit Appalachia were the Spanish "explorers" who passed through within a generation of Columbus' first voyage and less than two decades after the sacking of Tenochtitlan, site of modern day Mexico City. A series of unfortunate events may have inadvertently and indirectly made a lasting impact on the region. A shipwrecked sailor, Alvar Nuñez Cabeza de Vaca survived for seven years among numerous tribes beginning on the Gulf Coast, traveling west and eventually made his way to Mexico City on July 24, 1536. He was a slave on multiple occasions, became a shaman healer, and apparently developed fluency in several tribal tongues on his journeys. The book of his ordeal published first in 1542, despite the horrendous conditions of life for tribal peoples and the relative poverty of the land it describes, inspired more adventurers to explore the Americas. Hernando De Soto was issued a royal asiento in 1536 to "conquer, pacify, and people" from Florida westward. The expedition commenced, traversed much of present day South and North Carolina to what is now Asheville, and at the time of his death in March 1542, De Soto was interred in the Mississippi River. Some of the biological exchanges included horses, dogs, hogs, European diseases, devastation of native societies, plants, and foods. Runaway African slaves joined Native American tribes; populations were affected as Iberian and African DNA unquestionably entered the Native American bloodline (Galloway, 1997).

Although the Spanish explorers Hernando De Soto and the Juan Pardo expedition forty years later did not travel to the New River Valley of Virginia nearly 500 years ago, arguably their expeditions through nearby Western North Carolina affected social, political, ecological and even economic culture in the region (Ethridge & Hudson, 1998). Through European diseases, which decimated large populations of Native Americans, perhaps long after the Spaniards had passed on, the Spaniards left their indelible print in the Appalachian region. De Soto's strategy of capturing a local chief, and using him as collateral to traverse the limits of his chiefdom, upended the stratified society common among 16<sup>th</sup> century Native Americans. The powerful symbol of local society, accustomed to dwelling on mounds elevated among the tribal members, suddenly became a pawn under the control of an army of several hundred horsemen,

and a large entourage that migrated through the southern Appalachians. The result of this challenge to local authority tended to erode the more complex chiefdoms into the tribal societies observed when the English and French first encountered Native cultures in the region hundreds of years later. Even the elevated mounds were largely abandoned at the time of the early English trappers and adventurers (Ethridge & Hudson, 1998).

Corn, or maize, the staple crop and diet of North America, collected in granaries and often located upon the raised mounds, became the target of seizure and the principle source of sustenance for the Spanish expeditions between 1539-1560. Despised by many Spaniards, labeled as “trigo moro,” or “Moorish wheat,” the centuries of corn cultivation nevertheless kept the intrepid and often ruthless Iberians alive during their long migrations. Several hundred swine accompanied these expeditions through the South, and along with the horse, were previously unknown to the region. 500 years later, wild boars continue to roam throughout much of the south, are considered by many to be a plague upon local ecology, and are still legally hunted in many states. One might imagine sickness and death experienced by many Native Americans through consumption of pork that was insufficiently cooked. While Native Americans were familiar with dogs for centuries, the large mastiffs and greyhounds bred for ferocity and wearing armor brought another weapon to the region. These dogs were trained to disembowel upon command (Galloway, 1997; Hudson, 1993). The horse however, more than any single European animal changed the dynamics of work, warfare, and range of many Native American societies.

16<sup>th</sup> Century Spanish values in the Americas were divided between conquest, search for riches, proselytizing, and only in later centuries were large land holdings esteemed. Spanish conquistador Cortez’ quip that the Spaniards were afflicted with a disease that only gold can cure held true for the De Soto expeditions as well. While frustrated in their attempt to locate the mythical cities of gold in the Southeastern U.S., Spanish chronicles included descriptions of the southern Appalachians called Coos, and which captivated the imagination of later generations of Spanish adventurers. Ethridge and Hudson (1998) research on the Spanish explorers De Soto and Juan Pardo in the 16<sup>th</sup> century in the Southeast enhanced understanding of the pre-Hispanic locale of Native American societies. Through that research and the resulting finds of archeologists in those sites have combined to modify substantially the concept of the complexity of those societies prior to the arrival of the Spaniards. Between the natives who died in warfare with the intruders, or as a result of their presence, along with those who died from diseases

related to the Europeans, much of the grandeur, the traditions, and culture of those native societies disappeared. The native societies collapsed, with remnants merging into “coalescent societies” (p. 39). When the English arrived, the Indians were first empowered by firearms, then indebted to the English who had sold them, as a means of using the motivation of debt to raid other native societies for slaves. Prior to African slavery was Indian slavery in the Southeast (Ethridge & Hudson, 1998). Scholars have only recently begun to discover the depth of the impact of those first Spanish explorers on native cultures in the Southeast (Ethridge & Hudson; Galloway, 1997; Hudson, 1993). Similarly, we can only speculate what the long-term impact on the Southeast will be through the current widespread immigration of millions of the offspring of those first European conquerors, African slaves, and native cultures of the corn-based societies in Meso-America.

#### *Native Americans and Settlers in the New River Valley*

Native societies in the New River Valley included the Xuala later supplanted by the Cherokee. Most of the New River valley was unsettled by Native Americans, and was a hunting ground for Iroquois and Sioux who migrated from the Ohio valley. English and French trappers probably traversed the region in the late seventeenth century. To the east were the Powatan and to the south the Cherokee. The Saboni tribe were residing in the area of present day Roanoke, Virginia. At the site of Radford, was another small tribe known as the Totero at the time of the first English colonist/explorers in the region in the 1670's (Briceland, 1987).

In the 1670's the first Virginia Colonists settled in western Virginia, although many returned to the lowlands after some trouble with Indians. The early settlers often came in clusters from the lowlands of Virginia and North Carolina and often moved in stages, first establishing primitive dwellings and then returning to bring their families. Most of the early settlers in Carroll and Grayson County were Quakers from North Carolina and by 1800 numbered between one third and one fourth of the later county's population (Alderman, 1985, p. 7). Church records indicate that hundreds of Quakers moved on to Ohio and Indiana, and by 1825 more residents were Primitive Baptists and later Methodists. Besides subsistence farming, settlers' employment included mills, trading posts, and limited commerce with flatlanders selling cattle, swine, and timber. The earlier settlers purchased rights for their property from the Loyal Land Company. After 1782, settlers went from being “squatters” to settlers often by paying “a modest fee” (p. 9) to receive entitlements to their land. There was little slavery in the area of Grayson and Carroll



counties and a few families owned the majority of them. Census records of 1850 for Carroll County indicate that there were 157 slaves, owned by 46 families from a total of 996 families in the county (Alderman, 1979). Besides the clusters of families and communities, the region's inhabitants lived in relative isolation both among each other as well as toward the more populated part of the Commonwealth. German, Scotch, and English were the predominant backgrounds of the early settlers. Among the values prized by the settlers were independence, hard work, with "the true test of one's character being the promptness with which he paid his debts" (Alderman, 1985, p. 8).

*The railroad gave Galax its start.*

The railroad construction in the 1880s did more to transform the region than any single institution. The decision of Norfolk and Western to build the railroad line to Galax in 1904 gave the town its start, as well as its name, according to local lore. While the railroad was built to Galax to haul out iron ore, locally mined and smelted for generations, the mining was later abandoned as the ore proved to be of poor quality, and as other sources of the mineral were discovered both domestically and abroad. The railroad stop was the stimulus for many people to move to Galax from surrounding counties as well as from the Piedmont in order to begin local businesses. B. C. Vaughan and J. D. Bassett established the first furniture company in 1919,



an industry that was to give Galax its fame and become its bread and butter for eighty years. The local lumber industry was well served by the railroad and a string of furniture manufacturing plants that brought jobs and boosted the local economy. Later on, several textile plants were built

and some continue to operate as of this writing. The industries in Galax provided employment to many from the surrounding counties as well as to town residents. Besides industry, the economy is boosted by farming, with Christmas trees, apples and cabbage as the main agricultural products grown in the vicinity of Galax. The town, quite naturally, became an important commercial center as well. From its founding in 1906, the town grew slowly, topping the 2,500 population mark by the 1930 Census, and the 5,000 mark in 1950. Slow growth continued through the second half of the twentieth century, topping 6,000 in 1970, and nearing 7,000 in the 2000 census (see Table 1). Racial demographics reveal a small, but stable African American population throughout the town's century in existence, with a very small number of people claiming Native American status (see Table 3). Note the sudden emergence of a significant population of Hispanics in the 2000 census.

Table 3

*Galax Demographics by Race*

Galax	African American	Other	Hispanic
1910	N/A		
1930	148	17	
1950	327	24	
1970	338	7 (Indian)	
1980	311	11 American Indian	
		5	
2000	428	31 (American Indian)	757
2006			1300 (estimate)

*Ways of looking at people of the area.*

The Frontier model was a popular way of looking at the people of Appalachia and referred to the adaptation mountain people made to survive in the mountains (Hill & Beaver, 1998, p. 15). Much of the stereotype of the mountain people of Appalachia was constructed on a few high profile books, films, and an occasional incident of violence in the area. One of the better known incidents that helped shape the stereotype of the mountain hillbilly in the early twentieth century was the "Hillsville Courthouse Massacre" of 1912. On March 14, a gunfight broke out in the courtroom that left five people dead and seven wounded. Located just 14 miles from Galax, Hillsville became the center for the sensationalist press who descended into the

town to write their account of the “Allen clan” and of the local mountain people during a few weeks in the early spring of that year. The sinking of the Titanic, a month later, finally moved the nation’s attention away from the story.

Local historian Ron Hall (1998) takes pains to record every available document and perspective of the shootings and its roots in his account of the “tragedy.” According to Hall (1998), the background to the shootings had to do with Floyd Allen and his kin being on opposite sides of local and changing politics. The “Allen clan” had been losing political influence while those who had seized power were intent on ridding the county of their influence. Moonshine stories based on tales often propagated by local residents, and fiercely independent men who had the custom of carrying pistols in the second decade of the twentieth century, captured the imagination of the nation in the newspaper accounts of the day. In the trial, as the story goes, Floyd Allen said, “Gentlemen, I ain’t a goin’” [to jail] and immediately perhaps as many as 50 shots between the Allens and the law officials present were fired in a period of minutes, leaving a dead judge and deputy among other dead and dying in a crowded courtroom of perhaps 200 people.

Another local inhabitant, Thomas L. Felts, owned and operated the Felt’s Baldwin detective agency that was hired by the Commonwealth of Virginia to track down and arrest the Allens and their supporters after the murders in the courthouse in Hillsville. This is the same detective agency that was contracted by the coal companies of central Appalachia and Colorado during the violent labor struggles of the first part of this century with the United Mine Workers of America and the Western Federation of Miners. By most all accounts, the detectives were a ruthless group that used violence to control citizens wherever they operated, and who “made their living as mercenaries” (Hall, 1988). The Cliffside Mansion in Galax was the home of Thomas Felts, and the local sports park and recreation area is named Felt’s park. Of the seven detectives killed in West Virginia in a gun battle in the 1920 strike, three of them were from the Galax area, including the brothers of Thomas L. Felts. Felts allegedly had a private railroad car and a track that served his home. (<http://www.cccyclery.com/galfjbg.htm>, retrieved 2/18/06).

The diverse character of local folks today in some ways is reflected in the independence that was typical 90 years ago. Moonshine continues to be manufactured, allegedly. Folks will tell you they have personal knowledge of the practice still alive. According to Hall, two out of three people you ask on the streets in Hillsville today will tell you where you might obtain it.

Some of the native character of integrity, truth telling, and family values show up in the story of the Hillsville courthouse episode. When the daughter of the Clerk of Court was awarded a medal by the then Governor of Virginia for heroism for loading her father's gun and reportedly shoving an Allen to one side, local folks took up a collection and presented a medal to Floyd Allen's son, Claude for shooting the men he felt responsible who were shooting at his father in the courtroom (Hall, 1998, pp. 223, 236).

Local values included assisting those running from the law due to kinship, friendship or neighborliness—ties stronger than the law (Hall, 1998, p. 126; Jones, 1991). Recently in a mountain community in Western North Carolina, the friends and neighbors of Eric Robert Rudolph apparently followed this value by supplying and hiding the fugitive, accused of bombing a clinic where abortion is practiced and of planting the bomb at the Atlanta Olympics. Many mountain people were proud that even with hundreds of law officers working on the case, they were unable to find and arrest Rudolph for five years.

Violence is sanctioned by some, when “necessary,” even mob violence (Beaver, 1986; Hall, 1998, p. 91). Talking with a local might produce “short, mountain responses” (Hall, p. 178). At other times, people may be too polite to discuss a matter for fear of offending someone (Hall; Jones, 1991). Mountain folks traditionally felt superior to flatlanders because life was harsher in the mountains and the tough and intelligent survived (Alderman, 1985). Mountain humor sometimes feeds the fires of myth making for outsiders (Hall, 1998, pp. 134, 139). They value frugality and hard work (Alderman, 1985) and tend to be skeptical of outsiders. They are often generous, even beyond their means. A mountain friend comments, “Mountain people will promise you the world and give you what they can.” Recently when I had an accident in a mountain community, several cars stopped to offer assistance and at least three people got out of their vehicles to check on my condition. Speech is punctuated with anecdotes that provide evidence to the narrative or opinion expressed, or are the basis of humor. Not long ago when I was carrying an extra long canoe in the bed of my pickup truck, a local at a country store took a good look at my rig and commented, “You got more out than you got in, doncha?” He and his companion very much enjoyed the joke, and I enjoyed their merriment.

Although certainly not universal, religious practices and beliefs are a vital part of life for many of the people in Galax, as they are for many mountain people throughout Virginia and North Carolina. A local history of Galax, written in 1956, reads,

The history of a city's churches indicates well the trends of that city's development toward a well-rounded life for its citizens. The moral and spiritual growth of its people are of even greater importance than its physical and mental growth. Galax points with pride to the zealous growth and expansion of its churches. This nation, under God was founded upon religious principles of love for God and respect for the rights of man; hence, our city gratefully acknowledges this dependence upon God's merciful care and leadership. It is these principles of religious piety and love of country over which patriotically Old Glory protectingly flutters in the breeze (Cox, 1956, retrieved <http://www.galaxcentennial.com/history8.shtml>).

The faith is firm, fervent for some, and is certainly a major part of the warp and woof of Galax today. Even those who don't attend church regularly, often adhere to strong religious beliefs. The blend of faith and patriotism is prevalent, even as those feelings have become politicized during the George W. Bush presidency. Faith and helping out those in need as an expression of Christian virtue is a visible virtue in the community. The piety and fervency of believers contrasts with the more spectacular traits of the stereotypical independent, moonshine loving, latent violence of the mountain inhabitant.

#### *From Then to Now*

The exuberance of the author of a history of Galax, written in 1956, contrasts with the mood of the town fifty years later (Cox, 1956). Furniture plants and textile mills multiplied in town over the first fifty years of its existence. Growth was everywhere as local businesses grew and new businesses were moving in. The town was proud of new buildings, be they downtown, schools or churches (Cox, 1956). Monday, November 14<sup>th</sup>, 2005, Webb Furniture Enterprises announced the closing of its main manufacturing plant in Galax in January of 2006. Despite a long struggle to continue operations, Webb has gone the way of manufacturing in the South in the Global market-driven economy age. The company was founded in 1925 and thus has been a major source of employment for the town for 80 continuous years out of the hundred years that Galax has existed. The plant produced moderately priced bedroom furniture and claims "that competition from illegally dumped bedroom imports from China has forced us to close this facility" (The Gazette, November 16-17, 2005 page one). While the company will continue operating its particleboard plant, including 160 people in Galax, the 309 jobs lost makes a significant impact on this small town.

“People in communities do not act in a vacuum; they are often playing out national and global economic, political, and social agendas (Hill & Beaver, 1998, p. 22).” The closing followed the layoff of 151 workers in June. The local newspaper reports that Webb, along with more than 30 other companies petitioned the federal government to investigate cheap Chinese imports being dumped on the U.S. market in 2004. The government responded by raising tariffs on the imports for a few months, but they were lowered again in the fall of 2006. The U.S. Department of Labor reports that approximately 35,000 furniture workers in the U.S. have lost their jobs since January of 2000. Laments City Manager, Dan Campbell, “our manufacturing culture is leaving us, and we may not be able to recapture that” (The Gazette, page 11). The closing of the main Webb plant follows a string of textile and woodworking plant layoffs and closings over the past several years. The impact of a combined hundreds of jobs lost on a town of 7,000 is immense.

Galax is a member of the Appalachian Regional Commission and, together with Carroll County, is categorized as a town “At Risk” (<http://arc.gov/index.do?nodeId=2934>). Many of the town’s inhabitants have low income, while scores of young people leave to study and to seek better job opportunities in other locations. The layoffs and plant closings are a serious concern for the town’s residents who wonder about the future of Galax. The town’s native resident population is aging, with twenty-three percent of the population being age 60 and above (U.S.Census, 2000). The estimated current Hispanic population is twenty percent or more, meaning the town’s profile is changing very quickly. The younger Hispanic population has supplied labor and contributes to the local economy, yet also requires additional services from the town’s decreased resources.

### *Part Two-Local Residents Describe Life in Galax*

The couple sitting across from me on the tiny chairs in the library of the Galax Elementary School is concerned about the closings of factories and the effect that may have on their community and family. Tony Truitt works in his father’s jewelry store in downtown Galax, while Sonia is a Reading Specialist in the Elementary School. Both graduated from Galax High School in 1980. Tony says the decline of the textile and furniture factories has hurt the business environment. The rumors of closings with local textile plants going to import operations would leave a small work force. “Everyone here is kind of holding their breath wondering exactly what will happen.” Quite obviously, their livelihood, at least in part, depends on the local business

climate. They have two daughters, Leah is in high school and Kristen is in middle school. Kristen plays bass fiddle in a Blue Grass band. They have a lovely home in a very pleasant neighborhood in town.

Tony and Sonia describe the Galax community of the 1970s that they were raised in as segregated with lots of community activities:

*It was just like those little shows on television, you know you do the little things and the whole neighborhood gets together and rides their bikes and it was safe, and you could go anywhere. You didn't have to worry about anybody; you didn't have to lock your doors on your homes or your cars. You know, but there wasn't a lot for teenagers to do. Once we were in school, they cruised Main Street; that was pretty much the thrill.*



There were two drive-in theatres and a downtown theatre and people tended to hang out within their neighborhoods. The small Black community lived in segregated areas of town and in the county. Out of a graduating class of just over a hundred, there were perhaps 10 African Americans. High school Coach Brown, an African American, said he could remember when he had to sit in the balcony at the downtown theatre. Tony and Sonia describe a high-school experience where “everybody did everything. [Where] at halftime the football players came out and put their tubas on and the cheerleaders ran out and grabbed their instruments or batons.”

For those who attend college,

*There[aren't] any professional jobs beyond teaching to come back to. Obviously our biggest industries, our furniture [factories] are family owned, family or close friends so if you are not part of that there is nothing for you there. So, teaching as far as a professional job, is about it. Now, Tony's... dad owns a business so he came back to work in the business, and I had every intention of never coming back, but you know I married him."*

The downtown section of Galax, like in many towns across the U.S., has declined in importance of commerce and trade. The Truitts describe the downtown section as in decline following a period of "thriving" "revitalization" some twenty years ago,

*but with the decline in the industries here in town, it's just not anymore....There are a few old standbys still hanging on and ours is one of them, and a few new things coming in, but basically there is nothing downtown."*

Causes for the decline of downtown include

*the development of malls and people becoming more transient. You know it used to be a bigger issue to travel somewhere to shop. Now everybody does it so it made it hard for a lot of the smaller businesses to survive.*

There are newer sections of town on the northeastern side where the more recently arrived businesses are located. They include some of the chains such as Subway, McDonalds and Wal-Mart, but also some locally owned businesses like County Line Café and two Mexican restaurants, owned and operated by Mexican immigrants, Tlaquepaque and El Parian. Some of the local high school students are enthusiastic about the new restaurants, although lament that they must go out of town for real entertainment.

### *The Biggest Change*

The Truitts do not remember any Hispanics from their childhood. The first little girl came to school in 1987 or 1988. They describe the Hispanic presence in town as "the biggest change in the last ten years." All of the interviewees for this study concurred that the recent growth in the number of Hispanics is the most significant change in town. Galax is not alone in that change. Hill (1998) relates immigration as the first and foremost force for change and transformation in the South: "increased economic development in selected places...has attracted new populations to the region...these processes are forcing southerners to integrate into the mainstream, pushing



them from a century of isolation during which they were essentially objects of curiosity (Hill & Beaver, 1998, pp. 20-21).”

Immigration has affected the lives of the Truitts in several ways: For Tony, language is occasionally a problem in the jewelry store, as he doesn't speak Spanish and is subject to clients who speak no English. When a group is involved, the problem is exacerbated as he feels awkward not knowing what the topic of discussion is until or unless the group has a person who speaks English. The mundane task of filling out a claim form for repairs can become a problem if the name isn't written correctly and the item can't be found later. Yet, Sonia's life has been much more restructured as a result of immigration due to her work at the Elementary School. Besides the instructional component, Sonia carries a lot of concern for the well-being of the Hispanic children, and has become much more aware of some of the social conditions prevalent in that community. She has a keen sense of what is fair for children both within and outside of school, and speaks as an advocate when the needs of children are challenged.

*I started teaching in 1984, and I guess it was probably 1987 or 1988, we had one little girl, I was in the county and one little girl moved in who spoke no English at all, and she was in my class. And it was just a real struggle, what do you do? How are you supposed to communicate? How do you deal with this situation? And nobody knew how. We found a lady in the community who spoke Spanish and they encouraged her to come in and help translate her lessons, but probably more than that was [the need to] help a seven-year old child deal with providing information to her family, and [take] care of her sisters and brothers and any extended family that might be with them as far as food. You could see them in the grocery store, and she is telling them how much everything is and she is telling them how to go about doing everything, and it was just a lot of pressure and a lot of stress on this little bitty girl... living in this world with what little bit of English skill that she had.*

*And our program here has changed quite a bit. I have been here seven years and from the time I came here it's changed completely. ... there was a time when I first came here, all the Hispanic children, because they all spoke the same language, they thought [it] would be better to put them together, not because of a racial thing, but because they thought it might be in the best interest of those children. It took a few years to figure out, no, that is not in their best interest. That is not going to help them to learn to speak*

*English. They are just communicating with themselves and not learning anything, and we can't get anything in. So, finally we decided that wasn't a good idea and so they begin to disperse the classrooms and integrate... and we worked on that and that seemed to be a big push... We didn't have an ESL teacher. What do you do with them? Well, Mrs. Truitt is the reading specialist, she can give them a little time. Well, I don't speak Spanish. So, I ordered materials and we would work and did basically vocabulary... another big change [is] so many coming into school as young children [who do] not speak any English now.*

The Truitts talked openly about their concern for their daughters and the changes locally, both socially and economically. There is hope in town that tourism may be the next major income producer, and Tony is a believer in that future. He wants to see the business prosper and his family remain in town, while Sonia expresses fears about the town dying and even her job becoming obsolete if the Hispanics move on. Their older daughter said that her parents were divided over whether to stay in town or move on to a larger city. They would prefer their daughters date people from similar backgrounds and values, and while they do not reflect a Jim Crow perspective, I have the feeling that with the Hispanic presence, there may be a new area of racial and/or class concern. They are aware that some Hispanic males have white and Black girlfriends as well as Hispanic. The Truitt daughters have grown up having Hispanic classmates, and so they are already accustomed to a degree of diversity Tony and Sonia never knew as young people. School for the girls is multicolored and multilingual, and they see nothing odd about that. While they think there is a great opportunity to learn Spanish, their daughters are not presently taking Spanish in school. They mentioned a “very prominent” physician from Latin America who is married to a woman from the U.S. who is a neighbor of Sonia’s parents and “nobody sees anything wrong with that.” “Nobody thinks anything about it” [the mix of Latin American and U.S.]. It is obvious from our very frank discussion that these are new areas of discussion for the Truitts and that they have not yet worked out a belief system. Class has everything to do with the acceptance or the lack of the same when it comes to mixed couples. It is likely that skin color, the degree of skin color is also a factor in the acceptance of a mixed couple in Galax in 2006.

Two of the high school senior students I interviewed have a boyfriend or girlfriend of a different nationality, and with whom they have a serious relationship. Both are planning to move to other locations as a couple and pursue a life together. Students in Galax indicate there are

many marriages or significant relationships between primarily Mexican men and local women. The intermarried couple I saw in the restaurant on my first visit to town (see Chapter One) is part of the growing change in demographics occurring throughout the South (Cravey, 2003; Smith, 1998; Villatorio, 1996). Cravey has researched the Latino bar culture in the South, and finds pockets of generally middle-age white women engaging in informal relationships with Hispanic males (Cravey, 2003). Villatorio takes a term generally applied to Latin America and gives it a new twist in the U.S. South. *Mestizaje* traditionally referred to the blending of races that occurred during the colonial period and includes the Iberian, the indigenous and African ethnic backgrounds, with the prominence in the first two. Villatorio calls the blending of Hispanics and EuroAmericans the new mestizaje (Villatorio, 1996). Children born of these unions generally grow up hearing and speaking two languages, although by the time they have completed several years of school, English is normally the dominant language.

The Truitts are concerned about their town, and the conditions that are prevalent among the Hispanic community, including overcrowded housing, poverty, drugs and gang activity. Some of those concerns are related to security and safety, and some no doubt relate to the image the town projects to outsiders at a time when tourism is the current hope for the economy. It is likely that the lives of Tony and Sonia have been impacted more by the “free-market” economic system or globalization of markets than by immigration, despite all the changes Sonia has had in the school due to the presence of relatively large numbers of immigrant children. The pressures and concerns that are leading the Truitts to consider divergent family strategies are also weighing on other community members.

Language and communication is the single most mentioned issue in talking about the changes and challenges for local residents that have occurred in Galax. Resource Officer, Vicky Taylor, indicates that the lack of a common language affects her ability to communicate the law to the immigrants and hinders her ability to understand what they are trying to communicate to her.

*It [immigration] affects me mostly that I can't communicate. If I pull over a car and if it's someone who can't speak English, then it's very difficult for me to try to communicate with that person. That's the biggest problem, and I have also come across that they don't understand our culture and our laws. That's where they are having some problems because they feel that the Hispanic population that I have dealt with don't understand the*

*law and then when they come over here and we try to enforce it, then it's difficult for them as well as for us.*

The local police department has had to turn to bilingual people in the community to communicate with the Hispanic population, and is continually on the lookout for officers who speak Spanish. They have also attempted to win the confidence of the Hispanic community by learning about their culture, and have made efforts to communicate by making pamphlets available in Spanish. Taylor has learned much about the Hispanic culture by talking with members of the community. For example, she has learned that it is common for Mexican people to be afraid and suspicious of the police, and has worked to develop a fresh working relationship with students at Galax High School and in the trailer park communities where many Hispanics live.

Change in space and space use is obvious to the observer. A Mom and Pop's gas station and country store is now an Hispanic store, boasting fresh produce, canned goods, processed foods, bus tickets to Mexico, phone and fax service, money orders, phone calling cards, and even a little grill with ethnic foods normally unavailable in the typical "Mexican" restaurants that cater to gringos. There are reportedly six different such stores in this small town. The two "Mexican" restaurants are run by a family from Mexico, and are highly appreciated and integrated into the local business community. The mention of this family and the two restaurants is frequent among the interviewees as is the impact the restaurants have had on the local diet. Another obvious change in space and space use relates to the sport of soccer. Jealynn Coleman talks about the impact of soccer in the community:

*Soccer was never offered here, never. In the schools, never. And within, I don't know, maybe five or six years, all of your school systems, Grayson County, Carroll County, Galax City, have soccer teams. And the use of Felt's Park, almost [every] Saturday and Sunday they have the adult soccer team there...*

The adults have leagues that compete in the region in matches that become a focal point of the Hispanic community. Some local community members complain that all they [Mexicans] do is play soccer. In the schools, soccer is a melting pot of cultures, and is an important arena where culture and language learning take place, and where some of the stereotypes and barriers come down.

Other obvious persons whose lives have been restructured and impacted by immigration

are Elizabeth Stringer and Jealynn Coleman. Both are ESL teachers; Mrs. Coleman was a Spanish teacher and has since moved to the Elementary School where her knowledge of Spanish gives her specific skills needed throughout the school. Their jobs are only a part of how their lives have been impacted by immigration. Both have been active in meeting the needs of the local population to relate to the Hispanic population and also in reaching out to the Hispanic community. They are constantly being called on to assist with one community or the other. Both have become more proficient in their knowledge of Mexican Spanish and culture. Elizabeth has an amazing schedule of meetings, classes she conducts outside of her normal ESL classes, church activities, meetings and activities related to being President of the Hispanic Service Organization, and other activities within the Hispanic community. They are the “bridge” people, cultural mediators, without whom a successful merging of two distinct communities would be much more difficult. They have much to add to this study.

#### *Galax is a Town Whose Residents feel Ownership*

I have appreciated that virtually all of the local residents with whom I interacted in this study strongly identify with *their* town. Strongly held values of fairness and pragmatic problem solving are highlighted as well as the strong identification with Galax itself in the following quote. Sonia Truitt talked about the problem with legalization and papers:

*And you know one thing, speaking of immigration that has been learned here, is you come [and] take those ... illegal groups out, what do you do with those that aren't illegal? You look at families now, like I said before, you have the mom and dad ... come and maybe they are here illegally and brought two or three children with them, but in the meantime they have had two or three more, what do you do? You can't come and take momma and daddy away and leave children. I think the point has been made to immigration [ICE], [that] you can't do that here in this town anymore. You just can't come in and round everybody up because they did that once.”*

#### *A Welcoming Community, But Not Without Tensions*

It is clear to me that the town of Galax has made extraordinary efforts to reach out to the Hispanic immigrants. By all accounts, the churches have taken the lead in welcoming the new arrivals, and besides the schools, may be the institutions most affected by immigration. In Galax, the more than forty churches play a vital role in the life of the community at large and influence

the social interactions among its congregants. The presence of many poor immigrants has inspired churches to numerous outreaches. Churches and church members have collected food, clothing, furniture, and have made repairs on homes, taught English classes, provided transportation, health care, translated documents and worked as mediators for many of the Hispanic immigrants in places of employment, schools, and with local government, and allegedly even attempted to defend Hispanic immigrants from the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service. Virtually, all of the mainline churches have some services in Spanish, and some have hired Pastors from Latin America to shepherd local Spanish-speaking congregations. There are also several independent Hispanic churches with their own pastors. Schools, led by Superintendent Sam Cook, and former Assistant Superintendent Dr. Doug Arnold, have also worked within the community to be welcoming to the new immigrant population. I will address schools specifically in chapter four. Despite the overall welcoming to the community by its citizens, there are issues of resistance to the immigrant presence as some of the Hispanic and the native Galax residents describe.

Elizabeth Stringer describes a tragic incident in the summer of 2005 and her feelings that justice was not served. A small Hispanic girl in the third grade was hit and killed by a car while riding her bicycle in front of her house.

*The extremely sad part about this is that there was absolutely no investigation. It was [automatically] ruled an accident. No questions [were] asked of the driver of the car. A news team from Roanoke, Virginia, came down and actually filmed the place where she had been hit. There was still blood in the street. I think they were just really treated horribly... the... girl was not wearing a helmet, but... on the news channel [it] was seen as the family was at fault. It was almost as if ... she deserved it if she wasn't going to wear a helmet. And I... can't help but question whether this would have happened had it not been a Hispanic family who was involved. The family, of course, would have asked for an autopsy because the driver of the car tried to say that she hit the car, that the little girl hit the car instead of the car hitting her. However, the little girl's skull was crushed, one of her ears was literally ripped off, and it was just hard to imagine that that damage would have happened if she hit the car. So, the family had wanted an autopsy, but because of the lack of funds they were told they would have to pay for it themselves, and it was going to be well over \$2,000 so they couldn't afford that. They have just pretty much given up.*

*That's sad for any family, but like I said I just question whether the investigation or the situation would have been handled the same way had it not been a Hispanic family."*

Elizabeth relates another incident that was shocking and offensive to her and a local pastor's wife:

*The police in Galax on a whole are doing a very good job and trying. They currently don't have anyone on the force who speaks Spanish. They are desperately seeking a Spanish speaking officer, but currently they don't have anyone. Maria Alvarado, who is the First Baptist Church's Pastor's wife, and also my ESL aide at school, was stopped one time -- I don't know why she was stopped; I think she was speeding -- by a police officer. Maria speaks very good English, has very good language skills, but the officer who stopped her was very rude; told her to get out of the car, that she didn't understand why these people were here and couldn't speak English and didn't know our laws...Maria was too afraid to speak back to her and say I do speak English, I can answer your questions. So, she just let the officer go on, and it was just absolutely horrible the things that the officer said. I am not sure if the officer was aware that Maria understood or if she ...knew that she would understand and wanted her to hear those things, but I actually went to the police department to complain to the chief...I don't know if there was ever any disciplinary action or even any discussion, but there are some issues of racism and problems, not just with the police department, but with the whole town in general.*

Sometimes the customs that some of the Hispanic people bring to their new environment creates uneasiness in local people. Elizabeth:

*A lot of people fear downtown at night. There are lots of Hispanics who live in the downtown area and are used to you know walking around in the evenings; a lot of them don't have cars so their only mode of transportation is to walk. And since we are not used to seeing people walking especially late in the evening, people see that as something to fear. And so that has really caused an issue in the downtown area and dealing with Hispanics down there.*

It is common for Mexicans to congregate in the *zócalo*, or main plaza, in the evening hours, especially in small towns and cities. They meet friends, walk the downtown areas with family, sometimes eat or shop, young people eye the opposite sex in a sanctioned environment,

occasionally there is live music, and all generally transpires in an atmosphere of tranquility. The carryover of that practice to their new surroundings is a way of applying prior knowledge to a new environment and thus adapting to it. Unfortunately, the local people are as unaware of the customs of the immigrants as the immigrants are of theirs.

When the economy turns sour, immigrants are an easy target for people harboring fears or bias. Elizabeth again:

*Also, the factory closings are causing a lot of resentment because even though the Hispanics are in the exact position as the gringos and they are losing their jobs, and having to suffer as well, it seems that the Hispanics are being blamed for that. It's almost like when the economy is okay, it's okay for the Hispanics to be here, but when the economy is going wrong or people are losing jobs it's because of the Hispanics, even though everyone knows it's because of Chinese imports, but there just seems to be no changing this attitude or alleviating the fear maybe, or the ignorance, or the uncomfortableness maybe, that comes with having someone different here around you living with you."*

The local scene again is a reflection of national trends of periods of welcoming and also of rejecting the immigrant population over many generations.

J. Coleman expresses surprise to find bias among her fellow townspeople:

*I mean I have even faced people saying things to me about my job...when I tell them what I do for a living [ESL teacher in elementary school] local people—people I go to church with say, oh that just must be an awful job. I bet you have a hard time. I said, no, why do you think I would have a hard time? They say oh I bet those children cause problems. I tell them no. Since I have come here, I have had no discipline problems. I used to be a Spanish teacher for 8th and 9th grade, and I saw a lot of discipline problems. And then I came here to the elementary school, and it may, you know, be the age group, but I think too it's the population I teach. The children show an appreciation for learning, and I get huge amounts of support from the parents. I have no discipline problems. I tell these people that. I say no, I have a good job. I enjoy it.*

I: *Where do you think they get this notion?*



*S: I don't know. I think maybe it's just lack of knowledge I really do. Just lack of knowledge and a fear of a new culture, a fear of the unknown and they don't take time to find out.*

While rating Galax a seven on a ten-point scale of being welcoming to the Hispanic population, she hears comments such as the following:

*I have heard a little bit of resentments towards us having such a huge Hispanic population in our Pre-K program. You know the comment was made well they should let more white children in, they shouldn't allow these Mexicans in, and you know my response to that was well you know the program is open to anyone and parents come and once we get 36 students then we have a waiting list that is based upon need, you know academic needs of the students. And you know I don't see it as our program is favored toward the Hispanic population. It just so happens we have a greater number of Hispanic children that age that want to come here.*

Both Hispanic and non-Hispanic high school students spoke of racism at school and in the community, although when questioned further, they acknowledged that those people were in a minority. I will include their comments in the chapter on schools. The south has had a traditional divide between black and white, stemming from the colonial period and the institution of slavery. Exploitation and oppression of blacks by whites, often through violence or threat of violence are characteristics of the racial interaction in the old south. Emancipation in 1863 followed by the defeat of the Confederacy in 1865 freed black slaves from a legal contract of being owned as property, but it took another hundred years, more bloodshed and much social turmoil before the civil rights of black Americans began to be exercised in much of the south. Beginning in the 1960s, blacks began to enjoy the rights of all citizens, including more opportunities for personal advancement. It is interesting to note the timing of the first waves of Hispanic immigrants to the south as beginning in the late 1960s, first with seasonal workers in the fields, and increasing in number and length of stay over the next thirty years, peaking in the 1990s. As blacks enjoyed more upward mobility, the resulting vacuum in the labor market was being filled by immigrants, with the vast majority being Mexicans. The south is now adapting to a new racial divide where Hispanics form a rapidly growing entity, already outnumbering African Americans nationwide (U.S. Census, 2004). It is common to hear racist comments about

Hispanics from whites who have been socialized to avoid racist comments towards Blacks. In that sense, racism has a new face in the South.

### *Class and Worker Conflict*

Where one is located in the food chain influences the degree of welcoming or resistance to the town's new immigrants and the impact felt by their presence. The Truitts see more resistance from local residents to the "northerners" who have moved into the town than towards the Hispanics, and generally hear few complaints among their circle of friends and family. The top-paying jobs in the factories are occupied by those who appreciate the Hispanics for their hard work.

Hispanics started in the local workforce through seasonal farm labor in the mid 1980s, working in cabbage, Christmas trees and dairy farms, doing jobs that others did not want, and only later moving into the factory jobs. People who are or who have family members involved in factory jobs, however, see more negative attitudes towards Hispanics who "have taken the factory jobs." I had several conversations with a former lifelong factory worker and a former factory supervisor who refused to record an interview due to their concerns of consequences if some people in town knew who had said what.

When I asked about the change in the community due to Spanish speaking foreigners, she hesitated a minute, and then began to build up steam as she saw I was genuinely interested in her point of view. Joyce Wadell, a feisty sexagenarian, had a lot to say. Joyce said that there were good and bad people everywhere but she had seen people lose their jobs who'd been working in a plant for 20-30 years to a "Mexican," who didn't want to do the same work. The word *Mexican* was spoken in a manner that is reminiscent of the disdain commonly heard in the old South for a denigrating term for African American. I heard it several times while conducting this study. Méx i cn- the first syllable is pronounced with force, the middle syllable is very light in contrast and the vowel is barely distinguishable in the third syllable. There are similarities in the cadence and stress of Ní-ger in the mouth of a southern racist and Mex-i-cn. It is interesting to note, as a high school interviewee pointed out, that the term Mexican has become an all-encompassing word for anyone of Hispanic descent, regardless of the country of origin. In fact, when confronted with that fact, it has been reported that a common response is "well, they're all Mexicans to me."

One story Joyce told is about a Mexican who, after working three months on a job putting black finish on the furniture, said to his boss, "me no put black shit no more." Says Joyce, "*Some*

*don't want to work.*" The supervisor moved the Mexican immediately to another place in the factory, when there was a local woman who'd been doing that same job 30 years. Joyce fought with her supervisor over that but got no satisfaction. Her premise that *some don't want to work* stands in contrast to the views of most employers who hire Hispanic immigrants, and who are very impressed with these workers. She told of the thong shoes that the women were told not to wear to work anymore, but the Mexican women kept wearing them, and when asked, said they "didn't understand." Joyce and the other workers knew they did understand, and that double standard did not sit well with her and other workers. Anecdotes such as these raise questions of whether the issue is fairness for all in the workplace, or if there may be an issue of acceptance by the newcomers to the mores of the native workers "communities of practice" (Wenger, 1998). The Hispanics may not be allowing themselves to be socialized into the standards of the local workers. The local workers are naturally hostile to this change in power relations.

Language is mentioned often by interviewees as a cause of distrust and suspicion. Claude told of a cousin who became very angry when day after day a group of Mexican men stand around the entry to the plant talking "jibber-jabber" amongst themselves. The women feel very uncomfortable walking by them, and feel like they're being looked at and talked about in ways that make them uncomfortable. Anyway, one day his cousin turned around and told them all off. Claude mentioned the "uncomfortableness" of being around people when they speak in Spanish in a group and "you don't know if they're talking about you or not." He said that some of them "want us to learn their language, but they came to this country and need to learn the language here."

Jealynn Coleman serves as a cultural mediator to her friends and family who struggle to understand how to adapt to the presence of new neighbors who speak a foreign language.

*...a lot of people feel intimidated when they go to a store and have to walk past a group of people who are speaking Spanish. And a lot of people think they are talking about them and usually they are not, I would say nine times out of ten they are definitely not because I have heard them talk, and I tell them that, I say they are not talking about you. And then....too....American populations are resentful towards this influx of immigrants.*

People in small southern towns traditionally have been isolated from speakers of languages other than English, whereas generations of folks in cities such as Chicago, New York, Los Angeles, and Miami grew up hearing people converse in their native tongues. The global

economy has spurred foreigners to migrate where there are jobs and other amenities, even to small towns like Galax. The monolingualism of the vast majority of U.S. citizens is now a liability in a world whose traditional borders and boundaries are shifting. Language is power. The “uncomfortableness” often described by monolingual English speakers in the South when they are in the presence of people speaking Spanish (or other languages) is perhaps the struggle to adapt to changing demographics and a changing world. It may be the discomfort of losing control of their environment, where speech is generally and traditionally clear and understood, and where a violation of local code may have immediate consequences or at the least produce a protest. (e.g. What did you say? Are you talking to *me*?) It may also be a class struggle, where the “Mexicans” are seen as the new lowest class in society, and the fact that many Mexicans are able to speak both English and Spanish is in a way a putdown to worker class, monolingual speakers of English. They are able to speak to each other in a code not understood by native workers and also speak enough English to get by on the job. Not being privy to the foreign code is disconcerting. Perhaps, for the proletariat, the presence of people speaking other languages in one’s hometown provokes fear of being left behind, or left further behind than the precarious present, with lay-offs, factory closings and job scarcity, and increased competition for jobs from an eager immigrant workforce.

On the other hand, Mexican males are notorious for verbal and visual harassment of females. In that instance, the culture for women in the U.S., still struggling for equal treatment and with the workforce certainly not free from harassment or structural gender issues, is yet far more progressive than the culture for women in Mexico and Central America. The dynamics in the workplace and in the streets and markets of the new South raise many questions yet to be resolved. Women in the U.S. demand more respect from male counterparts in the workplace, in the home, and in public places. Yet, the majority of women are at a disadvantage linguistically, not speaking Spanish, much less the slang often associated with sexual innuendo, so how can they know they are the objects of sexual harassment and how might they respond if they did? And what is the learning curve for Mexican males to learn to refrain from the kind of comments that are not acceptable in U.S. society? And what about those Mexican males who score with women in the U.S. (Cravey, 2003)? What are they learning about interacting with women in this country? These questions are only a part of the complex constructing of meaning taking place in many small towns in southern Appalachia.

Joyce said that some of the Mexicans “*walk on other people from here and that’s not right. Maybe some people here have done the same to them, but still, none of them are going to convince me they are better than me. Some of them come in and want to take over.*”

This statement could again speak to the issue of hierarchy on the workforce or the issue of fairness. Is there an underlying message that they are not “*better than me*”—in fact they are *less than me*; I know it and they should also. It is as if there were an unspoken social reality—that Mexicans are lower on the social scale than native white workers, especially *illegal* workers. The term “Mexican” as pronounced and often used (mentioned earlier) would reinforce this social class concept. Coming in and taking over is against the local code within the community of practice (Wenger, 1998), which holds that newcomers take their cues from the older workers and earn respect as they are gradually socialized and accepted into the worker corps.

I asked if some of the laying off of local people was possibly over age issues rather than nationality and Joyce acknowledged that could likely be the cause. She herself is apparently a victim of age discrimination, after suffering a disability with a tendon problem in her foot. The bosses shifted her to a moving assembly line, knowing she had never done that kind of work before and she left after a couple of hours, because “either I left or they’d carry me out, and nobody was going to carry me out.” Joyce spoke about the illegal aspect of the Mexicans being here. She said that there were three raids [USCIS or the old INS] at different times on the plant she worked in and each time they rounded up a lot of Mexicans and “they were gone.” The feeling she left with me towards the round-up of allegedly illegal aliens was one of good riddance. The question begs to be asked, who called Immigration officials to raid the local factories? It certainly was not the employers.

Joyce initially said she could get a whole lot of people to come out for a pizza on a Friday or Saturday and who would be willing to talk about how they feel about things in Galax. Yet, after repeated trips to see her, Joyce said that no one wanted to be recorded talking about this issue, including her. Another interviewee offered the following observation:

*Yeah, and I do have some family that are union workers you know and they talk about, they are taking our jobs, but once you look at the jobs these people are taking they are jobs that have been open for anybody to take, but no one has, I guess, applied.*

I: *You are speaking locally.*

S: *Yeah, locally.*

I: *Things that you know about.*

S: *Yeah, things that I know about, it's jobs that ... your other populations wouldn't do and these people will, because while...it may be less than minimum wage[here], they are making more money than they did in their own country. And so, my response is, they are not really taking the jobs, they are fulfilling a need. And I will enlighten you a little bit on that. My dad was Vice President of a local furniture factory, and they used to tell[him] they had lots of jobs and couldn't find people to fill those jobs. Some people would come in and apply, but they would fail the drug test, you know things of that nature. And the Hispanic people would come in and met the legal requirements of immigration and they did the work and they did a good job, and they stuck with the job and were reliable employees. So my dad...was very pleased to have the Hispanic population because...they were facing a time of where they couldn't...meet production because they didn't have enough employees. With the influx of Hispanic individuals, then they could.*

I: *Now, would some local people hold that against your dad?*

S: *I think they might, yeah."*

These contrasting viewpoints are not uncommon, again, depending on the perspective of the person who is talking. For a worker who is displaced, she or he may *feel* the displacement is due to a foreign worker, and may find reasons to dislike their counterpart and see duplicity among employers or even complicity between bosses and the immigrant labor force. Employers may take advantage of the presence of willing foreign workers, who demand less, at least initially, and exploit the loss of power of the traditional U.S. worker. Temporary work that has no promise of longevity or benefits empowers employers at the expense of workers and displaces workers with benefits and tenure. Whether there is a design or not, the effect of the current situation pits workers against workers and in competition with foreign workers overseas (Faux, 2006). In the case of Galax, the local workforce is often in conflict with the immigrants. The traditional communities of practice (Wenger, 1998) on the job are being challenged by the new immigrants. A recent study indicates that unskilled native workers are leaving the workforce as immigrants make inroads (Carmarota, 2006). This condition could be the cause of future unrest

between ethnic groups, as oppressed peoples struggle with their counterparts rather than uniting to better their common condition.

The concept of “fairness” is strongly ingrained in the U.S. worker while the Hispanic immigrant, who may not have his immigration status in order, is willing to work, often without a contract, and with few or no benefits. The day labor market has grown exponentially as the presence of undocumented workers abounds. A new trend in Mexico follows the lead of U.S. industry—new temporary jobs are far outdistancing new permanent jobs in the manufacturing industry (Ortiz, 1996; Gonzalez, 2006). The temporary job with no benefits or severance pay creates a plight more desperate for Mexican workers in their home country, and provides yet more stimuli to emigrate to the U.S. At least two states in Mexico have practically zero population growth, largely due to the presence of its population in the United States.

Barbara Ellen Smith (1998) has researched and written about the class struggle between black and white workers and Hispanic immigrants in what she describes as

*the racialized political economy of the [postmodern] South* (p 168): *A newly racialized political economy seems to be emerging, one that displaces the apparent fixity and economic centrality of the black-white divide. The outlines of this new economy are still unclear, but it obviously relies much more heavily on the labor of workers who are from racialized national and ethnic groups only recently found in many places of the South*” [primarily Hispanic immigrants](p. 173). *The racist economy of the old South is changing to a new “race” of exploited workers, that of the primarily Mexican immigrant, while large numbers of African Americans are not in the labor force* (p., 174).

Tensions among workers often break down over racial divides, with Black against Latino, and white worker harboring hostilities against both.

The effect in a small town like Galax is to undermine the calm that has been forged among the workers over generations of labor conflicts and solutions. The relative cordial working relations between Black and white workers in recent decades is now challenged by the presence of Hispanic immigrants who have little to no roots in the local community, and who, for whatever reason, have little regard for the established communities of practice. As migrants, they may likely move on as jobs continue to disappear in Galax. Workers see the loss of jobs and look for causes, even as they are abandoning the workforce in increasing numbers (Camarota, 2006). As in the cycles of the past 130 years, immigrants become the scapegoats for job loss and

economic downturn. Workers feel this tension as their lives and livelihoods are threatened, even as the educated middle and upper classes are largely unaffected. In this sense, the largely welcoming community of Galax is divided over the presence of Hispanic immigrants even as it is impacted by the same.

### Concluding Thoughts

The overall effect of immigration in Galax is difficult to calculate at this time. Whether large numbers of Hispanics move on to other job markets or whether there is renewed pressure to enforce immigration laws, forcing significant numbers to leave is not known at this juncture. Should a majority continue to find jobs in the area and stay, the long-term effects of their presence is likely to become more profound. If large numbers leave, it is likely that some professional jobs will disappear, as well as some social services jobs.

The lives that are already directly impacted by immigration are many; the structuring and restructuring to accommodate the presence of Hispanics in schools, churches, workplaces, and markets is significant to the overall ethos of the town. Issues of race, class, and gender have a new face and will likely be ongoing debates. Worker tension is likely to increase over lines of race. A small but growing population of new *mestizos* has entered the schools and community. Hundreds of children are growing up speaking primarily Spanish at home and English outside the home. Fairness and other ethical and religious virtues will continue to be worked out in homes and in public places. Language and communication continue to be challenges for all sections of society. Fears must be addressed. Learning about each other is ongoing as different communities negotiate issues of power and acceptance. Health services, law enforcement, and other structural social services are challenged. Tax revenues must be maintained in order for the town to continue to provide essential services that are more wide ranging due to the presence of the Hispanic immigrants, and at a time when job loss is an increasing trend.

Galax, in a way, is on the cutting edge of globalization. Some of its native sons and daughters have become bilingual and are becoming literate in bicultural relations. Many of its children and young people are learning Spanish and how to interact with people from Latin America. Relationships among young people and adults that cross linguistic, ethnic and racial lines are becoming more prevalent, and mixed marriages are becoming more commonplace. More and more Hispanics are purchasing homes in the area. The traditional sounds of country music and Blue Grass compete with banda, norteño, mariachi, and merengue. Hotdogs with



mustard and ketchup are competing with tacos, tortilla chips and salsa. Market forces are creating structural changes in the local economy.

It is interesting that there is a fresh approach to studying the impact of the first Europeans who traversed the Appalachians—the Spaniards in the 16<sup>th</sup> century at a time, nearly 500 years later, when a new wave of Spanish speakers has come into the region, and whose long-term impact will take years to fathom. During this present migratory movement, Iberian conqueror has fused with indigenous peoples of the Americas and descendants of African heritage to become what educator, visionary, and scholar José Vasconcelos (1881-1959) termed, “La Raza Cósmica” (The Cosmic Race) (1977). Vasconcelos predicted the rise of a mestizaje from the merging of races from Latin America, that would, in time, through superior virtues from each race, exercise power throughout the western hemisphere. In Mexico, scholars question to what degree the modern “indio” [Mexican] (Indian) through his spirituality, is gaining ground in a modern world instead of losing it, as the shrinking numbers would indicate (Montemayor, 2000). Some speculate that the present immigration of mostly poor Mexican and Central Americans into the South is a step through which the tribes of the Americas are slowly taking back what was lost in the conquest (Da Jandra, 2005).

What is certain is that some of Mexico and Central America’s most intrepid poor have come to town, bringing their longstanding struggles and idiosyncrasies with them, along with their hard work ethic, their belief systems, their dreams and their beauty. It is difficult to imagine how Galax could ever return to what it was before the current wave of immigration, when Mexico found its way to a new home in the Appalachians. Let us now focus our attention on this immigrant community and examine how immigration has restructured and impacted their lives.

## CHAPTER FOUR—THE IMMIGRANTS

In this chapter, I attempt to describe the immigrant community in Galax by painting a portrait of two families with very different profiles, the Garza's—whose story appears at the beginning of the chapter—and towards the end—the Ramirez' family. Sandwiched in between these two stories is a discussion of some of the factors that impact the lives of immigrants in their home countries and communities, including conditions that foment immigration, as well as factors that affect them being here. In the narrative, I answer the research questions that relate to the impact of immigration and the structuring or restructuring of the lives of the participants as a result of immigration. I include discussion of the feelings of marginalization and gender issues, and conclude with a discussion about institutions that impact the Hispanic community. I open with a song from the popular musical band known as “Los Tigres del Norte.”

### *Ni de aquí ni allá*

“Vine buscando un no sé que a estas tierras tan lejanas y lo primero que me encontré que la gente es muy extraña. Tienen un cerco muy grande para que nadie se salga o para que nadie entre, yo no lo puedo creer.

Yo sé que es pura mentira que mi país se destaca yo sí lo miro que crece como el rabo de mi vaca.

Mi pueblo es como una tienda que la llaman abarroto porque de allí muchos viven y roban sin que se note.

En dondequiera es lo mismo yo no lo entiendo y no entenderé que mis sueños ni aquí ni allá nunca los realizaré ni aquí ni allá ni allá ni acá, nunca los realizaré

el ladrón y la mentira irán siempre de la mano  
porque creo lo que digo lo que pienso no es en vano  
así pasará en la vida

hasta que llegue el final  
quitándome las espinas para alcanzar el rosal.

En dondequiera es lo mismo yo no lo entiendo y no entenderé que mis sueños ni aquí ni allá nunca los realizaré ni aquí ni allá ni allá ni acá, nunca los realizaré.”

Los Tigres del Norte, 1997

*Neither Here Nor There*

I came looking for I don't know what in these far off lands  
 And the first thing I found was that the people are very strange,  
 They have a huge fence so that no one can leave or enter, I can't believe it!  
 I know that it is a lie that my country stands out, it grows as the tail of my cow.  
 My country is like a store that is called vegetables, because many people live off of it and rob  
 and no one even takes note of the loss.  
 Everywhere it's the same, I don't understand it and I never will, that my dreams from here nor  
 from there will I ever obtain, nor from there nor from here, I will never obtain them.  
 The thief and lies go hand in hand, because I believe what I say and its not in vain, this is how I  
 must pass through this life until the end, removing the briars [that have scratched me] in order to  
 reach the rosebush.  
 Everywhere it's the same, I don't understand it and I never will, that my dreams from here nor  
 from there I will ever obtain, nor from there nor from here, I will never obtain them.

Los Tigres del Norte, 1997



*The Garza Family*

Patty and I turn left at Country Club drive and wind our way past the beautiful homes one would expect on a street of that name. A short distance further and Country Club merges into a smaller, rural road lined with houses much more modest. A mile or so further and we spot our destination, a clump of older dilapidated trailers on the right side of the highway called Twin



Pines Trailer Park. We pull up outside number 3 just across the drive from several junked cars. The trailer to the south of number 3 is abandoned, sitting on a tilt and with broken windows. The trailers are crowded too close together, like tiny spaces in a campground. Number three is a bright blue color, with a rickety porch added on many years ago. The floor gives with each step we take up to the front door. It's hard not to think of the question if this family has come here with great sacrifice, how has life improved? Of all the poor villages and huts I visited in rural Mexico, this place does not seem to be a step upward. I knock twice until a young girl opens and with a nice smile but cautious, greets us, then leaves to inform someone else that we are there. She returns shortly and invites us in, saying that her older sister Azucena had told them we were coming. There is a strong unpleasant smell inside. Gabriela is the young girl's name and now she has that pleased and curious look I learned to appreciate in Mexico's rural children when visitors stop by. Irene, the mother, appears and is very polite, but seems like she has just awakened, and is a little ambivalent about the purpose of our visit. She invites us to sit down on the couch and we make small talk as we wait for Azucena and other family members to arrive. Within a few minutes there is the sound of a vehicle arriving and Gabriela announces, "here they come."

Azucena, an eighteen year old high school student, her older sister Rebecca and her father enter the dwelling and introductions are made. Shortly after, fifteen-year old son Lupe joins us. Azucena, whom I had met and talked with at school, seems very pleased to see us. I stated the purpose of our visit and with the permission of all, began the recording. Gabriel, the father,

dominated the interview although everyone participated enthusiastically. The author of the song of the Tigres del Norte above could have been thinking of Gabriel as the words were penned.

The family is from a small isolated town or village in the western state of Nayarit, where agricultural products are abundant, including tobacco and various fruits and vegetables. Gabriel has recently suffered a heart attack and has had an angioplasty and is limited in the physical labor he is able to perform. Two years ago he suffered the loss of a finger on a construction site in South Carolina. Gabriel was a farmer and worked in the fields from an early age. He remembers when the government invested in agriculture and banks would make loans to small farmers and it was possible to earn an income from farming. It was during the administration of López Portillo (1977-1984) when oil became the focus of both investment and arguably the cause of financial catastrophe, when the small and medium farmers were left without government subsidies. It is estimated that billions of dollars passed into private hands of government and union officials during several administrations. Gabriel says, *"The government has abandoned agriculture and doesn't support the people who plant beans and corn."*

When it became impossible to make a living from the fields, Gabriel became a truck driver and drove routes as far away as Mexico City, Tijuana and La Paz. In the early 1980s, he made his first trek across the border into California where he worked in the fields for a few seasons. He is an example of the circular migratory pattern that many men followed for years, crossing the border without documentation, and working seasonal jobs, then returning to Mexico during off seasons to continue to live with their families for part of the year. At least once he took his family to California, where young Gabriela was born. As a family, they had returned to Nayarit for a period of several years, until about 2000. In that year, a friend from Nayarit who had work experience in Virginia helped Gabriel to cross the border and get to Virginia. He worked on a dairy farm for fourteen months, then went to Arizona to pick up the rest of the family (at a cost of \$10,000 U.S.). When he returned, his job was unavailable and so he worked in the apple orchards, in Christmas trees, and eventually in textile factories and construction.

His dream now is to return to Mexico and set up a fruit business, buying from the fields and transporting the produce to a market town 200 miles away. He hopes to legalize the 1988 Dodge truck he has purchased and use it to haul the produce. When pressed, he acknowledges that he would like to eventually return to the U.S., but with proper "papers," as he is weary of driving without a license and having to use a cousin's social security number. He has had lots of

problems on the job as a result of not having papers, and says that in the area of Galax, all the factories now require papers and there are just no jobs available. His family is in a dilemma, and there is a perceptible ambiguity among the children and even the wife about returning to Mexico or staying in the U.S.. He is selling the trailer they are living in, asking \$3500, which seems like a lot. He has a lawsuit to acquire compensation for the loss of his finger, using the social security number of his cousin, and plans to take that money to return to Mexico and follow his dream.

Gabriel hasn't worked since October (4 months) and says he is simply unable to do hard physical labor anymore. He has a terrible cough that interrupts the narrative and the recording. He is maybe 50 years old. The life expectancy for farm workers in California was 54 in recent years. There is nothing about pity in his narrative. If anything, he is defiant towards what he sees as injustice against Mexican workers and anything he perceives as aggression against himself, strong in his vision of making the next move back to Mexico, but a bit cynical in his appreciation of laws, rules and authority. At the same time, there is acceptance of the uncontrollable factors of life, and a strong belief system to reconcile life's contradictions. As in the song "Neither here nor there," he has been hurt indirectly by the corruption in Mexico and has found that the dream of making it in "el norte" (U.S.) has been an illusion. He has learned that life is hard, that there are many obstacles for the poor in both countries, has seen his health seriously and probably permanently deteriorated, and I think sees that his days may be numbered. Despite his best efforts and hard work and intrepidity, his dreams are still unrealized, "neither here nor there."

A primary frustration for Gabriel are "*los papeles*," literally "papers" and refers to the term used for proper immigration documentation. The word came up in our interview twenty times. As the current debate over immigration policy rages in this country, millions of families like the Garza's are trapped between personal needs, being appreciated (and exploited) as workers and the incongruence of immigration policy and enforcement, unfriendly to their realities. The huge business of human smuggling thrives on the ambiguity of the situation, bringing additional costs and risks to hard-working families like the Garzas. Family separation is inevitable and children grow up in and outside of multiple school environments, and most eventually dropout of high school. As young adults they enter a labor force with the odds stacked against them. So far, none of the Garza children have finished high school, making upward movement very tenuous for the second generation. It is incalculable the impact that immigration has had on the Garza family. Immigration has provided a subsistence living for this family but

certainly not the American dream.

*Living the code.*

Bruner (1990) says that “Just Plain Folks” make meaning out of their lives through “folk psychology,” which he defines as “a system by which people organize their experience in, knowledge about, and transactions with the social world (p. 35).” They do this through an autobiographical narrative, which is based on a set of beliefs and expectations, and which is constantly being edited as one lives life’s experiences (Bruner). Gabriel’s life and narrative are consistent with a common cannon of maleness among Mexico’s poor. *Aplastado pero no se raja*—(beaten down by a combination of his own choices and a system that is stacked against him, he doesn't give up, doesn't quit or throw in the towel). *He is living the code of Mexican maleness*. Much like many Mexican boxers who may lack the flair, the precision, or the knock out punching power of the bigger names in that punishing sport, Gabriel is able to take the constant blows that have thundered against him, disdaining the attempts to humiliate him and thwart his attempts to rise above his humble origins, *y no se raja*—he doesn’t quit, doesn’t throw in the towel. He remains on his feet, bruised and bloody, minus a finger and with plastic in his heart, somewhat defiant, full of contradictions, not exactly a shining role model for his children, although I am sure that in his own mind he is giving the example of what it means to be a man, in the traditional Mexican male self-definition.

Life has mostly opposed him, the government [in Mexico] makes policy that creates nearly impossible living conditions; “papers” being the biggest obstacle to success in the U.S., yet he has remained in the fray. He has the symbols to prove his worth: a 1988 truck, owns a wreck of a trailer in the United States of America, and is planning to return home with several thousand dollars in his pockets (workers compensation for the injury) and on his own terms. He can cuss in two languages and enjoys demonstrating so, and has proved that he can compete in the workforce with workers from the U.S., and he doesn't take shit from anyone, not even the gringos. When necessary, he uses his fists to resolve conflicts to his satisfaction (or so he says). His family defers to him when they talk with strangers, laugh at the proper moment when he expresses his machismo, meaning his wife and children are subject to him. He is loyal to the religion of his parents, has broadened his scope of experience by attending a Protestant church, but without becoming converted. What more could he ask of himself? Of life? What more could his culture demand of him? His belief system is flexible enough to reconcile the exceptional and

contradictory occurrences of life. Gabriel's dreams have been neither realized here nor there, yet he keeps trying; this time his efforts are focused "there," even though his children are left here.

For Irene, the most important thing "*son mis hijos, que estemos juntos, y si vamos para Mexico pues, nos vamos juntos*" (are my children, that we are all together, and if we go to Mexico then, we all go together.) Her belief system is consistent with a traditional Mexican wife and mother who is loyal to a fault, supports any "maleness" from her husband, including infidelity, drunkenness and violence; is longsuffering and manages to keep her family together, including following him wherever he goes when possible. Her actions would prove to differ from her words. Even in an interview dominated by her husband, there were indications that she was losing patience with his decision-making and perhaps with other behavioral factors. When they had returned to Mexico from California, Irene says [around 1996], after about two years "*él se alborotó otra vez para venir de México a los Estados Unidos*" (he got all agitated to leave Mexico and come to the U.S.) More family separation followed his departure for the U.S. until 14 months later, when all the family was reunited in Galax. She was obviously struggling with Gabriel's decision to return to Mexico at the time of this interview, but oriented herself within her code and role with her expressed intent to keep the family together, to return together to Mexico, or at least stay together, wherever. She works in a food packaging industry that sells to Wal-Mart beginning at 6:30 a.m. and is currently the main breadwinner in the family, supported only by Rebecca's wages as a waitress.

#### *The children's stories.*

Azucena says that for her things have gone well. "We have learned many things" such as how to use a computer, she speaks English, and she has learned how to drive [a necessity for the location of their trailer in relation to schools, markets, and places of employment]. The girls have enjoyed attending the Baptist church very much, and worry about a lack of opportunity to continue with that practice should they return to Mexico. They like the way the pastor "explains things." One of the things they do not like about living in Virginia is that they don't have the same liberty to move around wherever they choose like in the schools and in their town in Mexico. There they attended classes when they wanted and when the parents were in the U.S. they didn't go at all. Azucena says that she was thinking about dropping out of school in Mexico to work in the fields, but when she came to Galax she decided to study for a career. She is afraid that she will not be able to continue to study in the U.S., due to her lack of proper



documentation. The frustration with lack of “papers” surfaces in her conversation often. “*Allí es fácil, todo allá, puedes sacar tu licencia, puedes sacar tu todo, no tienes problemas, pero aquí no puedes sacar nada, porque luego, luego te piden papeles*”—(There [in Mexico] it’s easy, everything there; you can get your driver’s license, you can get your everything; you don’t have problems, but here you can’t get anything, because right away they ask for your papers.)

Rebecca is beyond the age to attend high school, and seems content with her job as a waitress in *El Parian*, one of the two Mexican restaurants in town. Her fears are that there is no work here in Virginia, although she didn’t say for whom she has that concern. She says that in their tiny town in Mexico there are no jobs available but that there is employment at some of the factories in Nayarit. She has mentioned the desire to return to Mexico in later conversations.

The first time Rebecca and Azucena tried to cross the border, the Border Patrol arrested them. They were treated well, with the exception that they were not given anything to eat for a day and a half while they were locked up. Then they were released at the border town of Nogales at 11:00 at night—not a good place or time to leave two young girls. They called the “senior” – the coyote, or human smuggler, who immediately got a hotel for the girls, and gave them money to cross again. The second time they got across the border with no trouble.

Little Gabriela voices her concern that “*si fuéramos a México, yo no sé nada de México, y creo que voy a reprobar*” (if we were to return to Mexico, I don’t know anything about Mexico and I think I will fail [in school].) Her English is by far the best in her family, and all of her schooling has been in the U.S. She is a prime example of the children of undocumented immigrants who have spent more of their lives in the U.S. than in their parent’s native country, have struggled to learn English and the ethos of schools here, and have made admirable progress in every area, but are living with the fear of change that could send them to what is to them a foreign country and without the same skills children their age have in those countries. Another fear she expresses is that a neighbor who threatens to do so from time to time might kill her little dog. If she had one wish it would be to take her dog there [to Mexico]. If she could bring changes anywhere it would be with immigration [policy]. She was born in California, and if the family had good legal representation, they might be able to solve their immigration problems through Gabriela.

Most of the people in the area have treated them well, and the children mention some by name as being very helpful and friendly, especially some from the Baptist Church. They do talk

about discrimination and “racism” and provide examples of what they perceive as discrimination and give examples of racial comments at school. Lupe emits an expletive about “*gabachos*” (whites), which seems to reveal deep feelings of hurt, but expresses anger. He is currently attending a county school, and does not sound at all happy. Later in another interview, Azucena said that Lupe had fought with a local boy in school, that he had bloodied him up for “saying [racial] things” and continued to be very angry over the incident. They talk about some problems with whites but also mention problems with African Americans, whom they call “moyos.”

When asked where they feel the most at home, everyone laughs loudly and almost in unison say emphatically, “there!” [Mexico]. The tape runs out and the conversation continues a while longer. As often happens, some of the more revealing comments come when the recorder is off. We purchase some *tamales* that Irene and the girls have made to sell, (which turn out to be very good as we found out later), and step outside. As we leave the trailer, I take a closer look at the neighbor whom I assume is the dog’s tormentor and a potential threat to the well being of the family. He has a Budweiser in his hand, wears a cowboy hat and boots, and it seems to me that he purposefully ignores all of us. On his trailer, a large rebel flag is prominently displayed. Later, I pondered the significance of this symbol, still flown or worn proudly by some in the South, as an icon of southern white culture. It is interesting to juxtapose that symbol with a prominent one from the Mexican community.

### *Juxtaposing Symbols in the New South*

Two flags that represent two cultures resisting change and, to some degree, are in a face off in Southwest Virginia impacted me. The rebel flag prominently displayed on vehicles, houses, and trailers of the poor in the New South are often located immediately across the gravel drive that separates natives from the “Mexicans,” who in turn, often display just as prominently the flag of the Virgin of Guadalupe. During the fight for Mexican independence, when the politicized priest Hidalgo prepared 50,000 machete armed Indians to attack Mexico city in 1811, the rallying symbol was the Virgin of Guadalupe—the dark-skinned “mother” of the Mexicans. Across the lines, the Spaniards and loyalists rallied their troops under the flag of Spain and around the flag of the *Virgen de Los Remedios*—the light-skinned European Virgin. The one spoke of Iberian preference by the gods, the other that the mother of God was one with the indigenous peoples of the Americas, and especially with the Mexican Indian. In that clash, symbol fought against symbol—Virgin against Virgin. Hidalgo lost his gamble within a period

of months, and was beheaded along with other prominent revolutionary leaders. Only a dozen years later was Mexico able to win independence, simultaneously with other new nation states of Latin America. The image of the Virgin of Guadalupe is overwhelmingly the most prominent symbol of the Mexican people even today. I have met people who claim to have killed people (usually Protestants or other non-Roman Catholics) “en nombre de la Virgen” (in the name of the Virgen [of Guadalupe]).

It was the union blue that prevailed over the rebels in the Southeastern U.S. nearly a century and a half ago—some 50 years after the slaughter of Mexican Indians who were led by Iberian blooded criollos like Hidalgo. Two oppressed people from two different countries demonstrate identity and resistance to assimilation by the display of two very distinct symbols. The one a symbol of a bygone era where southern whiteness ruled and the oppressiveness of the institution of slavery dominated social, economic, and political life; the other a quasi-religious symbol that blends national and ethnic identity with the divine. Allegedly, even today, sometimes the Confederate flag is a sign of the Ku Klux Klan, and thus may portray a sinister message.

With notable exceptions, these two symbols are more prominently seen among the poor of both cultures—the oppressed cling to symbols of identity and resistance. Educational levels, socioeconomic factors, identity—i.e. I am more than myself—I belong to something larger than myself—something transcendent. I may be marginalized, poor, discriminated against, “politically incorrect,” but I am who I am and belong to a culture of some standing, significance, and antiquity. I have dignity, meaning, language, and symbols. I am struck by the implications of symbol against symbol (Virgen de Guadalupe versus the Rebel flag). How many places is this standoff being played out in the new South as the poor of both countries struggle for jobs, for survival, to preserve identity?

*One year later.*

Shortly after our interview, Gabriel received his worker compensation; I heard it was three or four thousand dollars, and returned to Mexico alone. The family decided to stay in Galax where there was some income. Azucena dropped out of school and joined her older sister working in a Mexican restaurant to help with the expenses. The family is angry at Gabriel for taking all the money with him and leaving everyone here. Irene, the mother, without advising the older daughters, moved out and reportedly was living with another man in town, taking little

Gabriela with her. Rebecca and Azucena returned from a New Year's celebration to find them gone and the trailer empty. Azucena was naturally very upset and quit her job, making Rebecca the only person working to support the two of them in the trailer. Recently, Irene returned to the trailer with the older daughters and their younger siblings. Fed up with the home and local job situation, Azucena wants to go to Harrisonburg where she feels she has a better chance to find a job. She has become one more high school dropout among Mexicans in U.S. schools. Rebecca thinks that "her mother's husband" has taken another wife in Mexico.

*Immigration, impacts and consequences for a family.*

The Garza family is here in the U.S. because they followed the father across the border. In the act of the border crossing, the two oldest daughters were arrested, and presumably have a record with Homeland Security. They traveled from Arizona to Virginia to be where Gabriel had found work. They left their home country and are making their way in the U.S., without legal documentation, and now without the presence of their father. It is not unusual for the family, or a part of the family to remain in Mexico while the father works and lives in the U.S., sending money to the family as he is able. The Garza family is living an interesting role reversal with the father returning to Mexico while the family remains in the U.S.. The marital crisis may be one in a series or an aberration. The separation could be temporary, like many in the past, or if it is true that Gabriel has "taken another wife" in Mexico, perhaps the original family unit is dissolved. Irene's decision to stay in Galax when Gabriel returned to Mexico, regardless of her reasons for doing so, was a violation of her personal code as a wife and mother, even as she stated her priorities and intentions in our interview.

Was the decision to stay based in part on the lack of opportunities for the family back in Mexico? How much did the problems that harass the family over "papers," or lack of them, influence Gabriel's decision to return to Mexico? In his own words, "*What am I going to do [here], hiding, at any time the police may come knocking on the door, and there [Mexico] no, there I can get my license... here if they catch me loading shrimp in my boxes [of merchandise] the police will give me a hard time, they will take my truck, and there [Mexico] no, over there a person requests his permit to buy and sell.*" If it cost them \$10,000 to pay the coyote to cross the border in 2000, and the girls were arrested even with that arrangement, how much would it cost them to attempt to return to the U.S., if they went back to Mexico, couldn't find employment and needed to return? How would another change like that affect the children and their schooling?

There is a saying in Mexico, “*más vale mal conocido que bueno por conocer*” (better something that’s bad but known, than something that may be good [but is uncertain], as it is unknown). Perhaps that is the thinking influencing Irene.

Immigration has obviously had an enormous impact on this family. The lack of proper documentation has made a difficult transition much more tenuous, and arguably could be at the heart of continuous poverty, health problems, dropout from school, and family separation and breakdown. The pressure of living and working in the U.S. without legal documents has taken its toll. The Garza family, seen in that perspective, is one more victim of a complicated immigration conundrum, involving policy in the U.S., hemispheric economics, along with a lack of vision and investment in development in Mexico. It remains to be seen what will happen with Rebecca, Azucena, and little Gabriela. Will Azucena ever return to school? She is probably too old to return to high school, but perhaps she will one day work for her G.E.D. Will any of them return to Mexico, or will they be forcibly returned by strict immigration legislation and enforcement? What will happen with Gabriela, who seems to be more assimilated to life here than in Mexico? Should he return, I am certain that Gabriel will never assimilate to the U.S.; it remains to be seen if any of the children do. For Gabriel and possibly for other members of his family, just as for many Hispanic immigrants, the *sueño americano*—(the American dream), does not play out as hoped. Some perish on the journey to cross the border; others become trapped on the border and enter the chaotic ethos of poverty there, and many who make it here find that even with the increase in wages, it is often hard to maintain steady employment, pay off the debts incurred to human smugglers, and to make a living for a family. When the hardships that accompany the undocumented plus the feeling of marginalization are added to the experience, the sad words of the song *Neither Here nor There* become prophetic: “I will never obtain [my dreams from here nor from there].

*Factors of immigration impacting home communities.*

It is estimated that as many as 25 million Mexicans live in the U.S., which is roughly 25% of the population of that country. As a strong family and community society, where family members live tends to influence migratory patterns of other family members. The networks of 25 million people are obviously extensive, and this fact can be seen in Mexico as much as in the U.S. At almost any time of the year, although especially during the month of December, parades of Mexicans who live and work in the U.S. return to their native communities. Many of them

drive down, making traffic a problem in small towns especially, where the amount of local traffic is minimum during the rest of the year. One of the aims of the trip back is to parade the trophies gained during the years in the U.S. Cars and trucks that would be inaccessible to the same people who remain in Mexico are some of the more coveted symbols of success. Loud stereos play and compete for prominence as long lines of these vehicles circle the downtown sections of town. Clothes from the U.S. and lavish gifts for family members and friends round out the display of new wealth. Money transfer services have popped up all over in small towns and communities who have a population abroad, giving new life to old and weak economies. Fax, telephone, and bus services generally accompany the wire transfer small businesses as visible evidence of changing communities back home. Naturally, information and contacts for human smugglers, known as *coyotes* or *polleros*, are generally available as well. Many of the artifacts the returning immigrants carry remain in the local communities, increasing demand for products “*del otro lado*” from the other side [the U.S.]. One of the trophies that are put on display by the transnationals is their language gains. English words and phrases are thrown into normal conversations between native Spanish speakers, often with a non-native’s accent. Many of these words and phrases become a part of the new lexicon in town, and it is “cool” to be able to make use of what becomes a kind of hip slang.

Naturally, for locals, the desire to earn more money and break out of stratification patterns is given a huge boost through these normally short-term return migrations. Returning migrants talk to those who have not made the journey north, and the feasibility of such a journey becomes more believable as it does desirable. A recent non-scientific study in a school found that the vast majority of the students intend to emigrate to the U.S. When asked as a group why they would want to do such a thing, one boy responded, “*¡porque es más chingon!*” (It’s a lot more cool.) Some people feel that the plan to emigrate to the U.S. is contributing to the dropout rate in Mexican schools, along with lack of employment opportunities. Crossing over into the U.S. has become a rite of passage for many young people in communities with strong ties to transnationals in the U.S., especially in the largest sending states such as Michoacan, Guanajuato, Oaxaca, Zacatecas, and now Chiapas.

*Factors that foment immigration from home countries.*

Other changes affecting migratory patterns include the abandonment of farms along with the continual urbanization of the country. Since the inception of NAFTA, two million have left

small farms. When Gabriel says that the government does not invest in agriculture, he is correct as far as the small farmer. The government has seen that it is neither profitable nor competitive to invest in small farms, while putting funds in the mega-farm productions to compete globally. The small communal farm plots were one of the fundamental promises of the Mexican Revolution, the Constitution, and of the ruling PRI party for many decades of the last century. In Chiapas, one of the poorest states and traditionally a coffee producer, the tropical storms that battered the region last year wiped out the coffee plants and allegedly some people in isolated regions, are living on herbs and wild plants. One resident remarked that “now the hunger is abated because many people have had to go to the United States” (Mariscal, 2006).

There is a new rise of non-permanent manufacturing jobs with no benefits, and what some have called a short-term “disposable” labor force (Faux, 2006). The Bank of Mexico reports that in the manufacturing sector, this “never before seen” phenomenon is occurring as almost all the new jobs being created are short term, allowing employers to pay by the hour and lay off workers with no benefits (Gonzalez, 2006). Thousands of applicants appear for a few jobs, giving employers the cheapest possible labor at company dictates.

The national census bureau INEGI reports that there are 1,550,000 unemployed of otherwise employable adults, up nearly one million or 221% over the past five years (Zuñiga, a, 2006). A little over 28% of the working population has found some kind of employment in the informal sector (Zuñiga, b, 2006). Mexico and other countries in Central America have shown they are incapable of producing the amount of jobs needed for the numbers entering the labor force each year. I have heard of cases where medical doctors are working as laborers in the mines. The cost of the formally subsidized tortillas and gas has skyrocketed, making basic living more difficult. The few who have pensions have seen the value dissipate due to devaluations and inflation. One retired mining engineer with a college degree I know was receiving the equivalent of \$50 dollars a month after a lifetime of work as a professional. In short, as far as jobs and workers, there are fewer jobs available after more than a decade of NAFTA, and conditions for workers are going backwards rather than forward.

According to the La Organización Internacional del Trabajo (OIT), the International Organization of Work, Mexico has had the greatest salary erosion of any country in Latin America, placing it in the group of the “worst paid” workers in the world (Muñoz, 2006). While Mexico boasts the tenth most robust economy in the world according to the World Bank, the

distribution of wealth has regressed, and the power of the individual to purchase has fallen even more (Gonzalez, 2006). Mexico falls from tenth to 70<sup>th</sup> place in per capita income and to 80<sup>th</sup> place when income is measured by the ability to purchase, putting it even with Botswana (Gonzalez, 2006). The fourth richest person in the world, Carlos Slim, is a Mexican citizen and intimate of former president Carlos Salinas de Gortari (1988-1994), the primary promoter of the NAFTA agreement. Slim's wealth multiplied during the period when all Mexicans were urged to show patriotism and to "tighten their belts" to survive what was known as "la crisis" or the crisis. It has been reported that Mexico increased from two to 26 billionaires during the Salinas administration, all at a period of job loss, and salary reversals. The peso devaluation immediately following the Zedillo inauguration in 1994, on the heels of the Salinas years, unquestionably sparked the following exodus of millions to seek their fortunes in the U.S.

The *remesas*, the remittances—the money sent home from immigrants who live in the U.S. is the largest single source of income in Mexico. The amount has steadily risen over the past few years until the remittances are now of greater amount than the gains by the nationalized oil company Pemex, at 18 billion dollars last year, and is estimated to ascend to 24 billion in the current year (Gonzalez, 2006). Including the Caribbean, Central and South America, the remittances ascend to an estimated 54 billion in the current year (Martínez, 2006). This money supplies the basic needs of many poor and middle class families in the sending countries without which the misery of the poor would be much more acute and widespread. It drives the small new businesses in local towns and communities as mentioned above. The effect of the remittances undoubtedly helps to staunch social discontent from boiling over. Another phenomenon is that in the states with the greatest remittances such as Michoacan and Guanajuato, the population growth is practically nil (Gonzalez, 2006), an indicator of the overall impact of immigration.

A positive development that has emerged among Mexicans living in the U.S. and who continue to have strong ties to their native communities, sometimes referred to as transnationals, is the formation of hundreds of clubs made up of people from the same home communities. These clubs or organizations of transnationals have been taking on developmental projects in their home communities and are making a big difference in some cases (García Zamora, 2003). These people-initiated non-profits offer a window of hope and an effective working model for future developmental projects. In some cases, the organizations work with local and federal governments on specific projects. In other instances, entrepreneurs have used skills they have



developed along with capital gained through working in the U.S. to begin sustainable business in their home communities.

*The additional burden on central American immigrants.*

In this section, I describe the particular hardships that Central Americans face as they emigrate north to the U.S. Although a small population in Galax, there are a number of families from Central America in the area.

In Galax, there are a few Central Americans scattered among the mostly Mexican population. One student from Honduras, who lost his father in unknown circumstances, has become a favorite of some of the students and teachers. Coach Brown, an African American, has unofficially taken the role of mentor to this young man, who has also become the official trainer of the basketball team. The *tiendita* called “El Progreso” is owned and operated by Pepe and Carla, the latter being a citizen of Guatemala. For Central Americans, the conditions that impel immigration are many and the typical journey north implies crossing multiple borders, and with much greater risks than for Mexicans who have only one border to contend with.

Some of the immigrants from Central America came up in the 1990s at a time when the peace accords were being worked out to end the decades of civil wars that ended in the death of hundreds of thousands of people. For years, there were enormous refugee camps on Mexico’s southern border, with refugees living in horrific conditions, and awaiting the outcome of the wars and peace process. Some avoided the camps and continued to migrate north. While some immigrants came as political refugees, others simply fled the violence and crossed over into the U.S. as undocumented aliens. Later in the decade, the forces of nature impacted the lives, the ecology, and the economy of millions of Central Americans. Hurricane Mitch, for example, created such long-term devastation that Washington authorized temporary immigration passes to many Central Americans. Other powerful storms such as Hurricane Stan in 2005 brought additional misery for the populations of those countries. Violence continues as a way of life for many residents, whether through gangs, criminal activity or repressive governments. These factors, combined with few options of employment at wages that make life unsustainable, create conditions to favor the option of the long and dangerous journey north.

Central American immigrants are not welcome in Mexico; the government makes that abundantly clear at the first encounter on the southern border, at the midway in Mexico City, or closer to the destination of the pilgrims, in Mexico’s northern border. Whether it is to stop them

and turn them back in their official roles, or extort money or for sexual aggression, the Mexican authorities have a huge and negative impact upon these travelers. Because of that reception, many Central Americans opt for an illegal crossing into Mexico, and generally try to hop a train heading north. Another risk of violence they face is the gang activity on Mexico's southern border. The Mara Salvatrucha or MS-13 operates much of the drug traffic, the prostitution, and also attacks the immigrants even on the trains (Heredia, 2004). A disproportionate number of people in towns like Tapachula have missing limbs, due to either violent attacks or accidents on the trains. There is at least one non-profit group that is dedicated to providing medical and other assistance to victims who have lost limbs.

As many Central Americans do not have the resources to make it all the way to the U.S., and as many more have their savings robbed, those who do make it into Mexico's interior need to survive and gather new resources to continue the journey north. It is common that young women are targeted for sexual profiteering, while males may have more options to find temporary work. Often, the immigrants make several stops lasting weeks at different cities en route to Mexico City. If they stay with the rail system, they must inevitably change trains in the notorious "La Lechería" station in northern Mexico City.

In Mexico City, the Central Americans are again the target of gangs and law enforcement. In some instances, due to the lack of resources many have, it seems that both gang members and law enforcement use these travelers as a means of practicing violence. Since it is not known how many arrive to La Lechería, there is no way of knowing just how many die there or en route, although some reports indicate that an average of 300 arrive each morning on the train from Veracruz (Fernández, Reséndiz, & y Martínez, 2006). Some private citizens risk their lives to offer assistance to these strangers, and there are a few non-profits that exist to offer refuge (Pacheco, 2006).

Those that survive La Lechería continue to face the normal dangers undocumented workers encounter at Mexico's northern border, including more gangs, violence, and extortion by police, coyotes, and then are welcomed by the Border Patrol Agents of the U.S. Homeland Security. If they are caught, they are processed and given a few days to show up for a court trial, at which most never appear. Armed with a legal document that allows them to be in the U.S. for a few days, the Central Americans then make for their destinations where they are likely to have family or other contacts to begin to live and work. When they don't show up for the trial, a

warrant is issued for their detention, and they fall into the ranks of the illegal. The amazing thing is that some of these immigrants return home from time to time, and from there, begin the journey north again. Those that are able to obtain papers in the U.S., enjoy the privilege of coming and going as they have means, including taking the airlines.

*From farm work to entrepreneur.*

In this section, I discuss the employment and relative upward mobility of Hispanic immigrants in the U.S.

Just as most of the first immigrants into the region of Southwest Virginia worked in the fields, farm work is often the first employment that the newly arrived obtain. But farm work is hard, is often dangerous, and statistics indicate a short lifespan for farm workers (Reeves, Katten, & Guzman, 2002). It is common to hear immigrants comment about leaving farm work for other less taxing employment or that is better remunerated. Jobs in manufacturing, like the furniture and textile plants in Galax are preferred, but now are usually reserved for those who can demonstrate evidence of residency, a change that has accompanied the immigration raids by ICE. Construction jobs are highly prized since they usually pay more per hour. New Orleans has had an enormous increase in Hispanic immigrants since Hurricane Katrina, most seeking employment in the reconstruction effort. As a mobile work force who move at their own expense, hard-working Hispanic immigrants are highly prized in the construction business. I accompanied one of my sons on his summer ice cream business in Charlotte a couple of years ago, and was absolutely shocked to see the thousands of Hispanic construction workers scattered in many dozens of construction sites where new homes were going up. The numbers of Spanish-speaking workers has made it imperative to have foremen who are fluent also, and many Hispanics who have obtained legal papers have formed their own work crews, are employed by native citizens, and in some cases have even formed their own companies.

In Southwest Virginia, landscaping and lawn care services employ many Hispanics. I have noted a similar pattern locally, where the immigrants work for several years for a non-immigrant native, and then begin to seek individual contracts on their own time. Of course, many Hispanics have stayed within the known by working for Hispanic owned businesses such as the ubiquitous Mexican restaurants. Many of these workers start out as dishwashers, waiters, and cooks, learn the business and later on start their own. Many women have found employment as maids in businesses such as hotels, but also in private residences, with some forming their own

small companies. Hispanic immigrants in the Southeast largely sustain farm work, labor-intensive jobs, and service industries today. If the facts were clarified, it is likely that the majority of those are undocumented or have false papers. As Barbara Ellen Smith (2005) and others have noted, the traditional Black labor force of the South has shifted to a brown color.

*Problems with adaptation “se siente uno como solo” (one feels all alone).*

While many of the adults seem content to make slow economic gains and are able to negotiate legal residency, obtain false documents, or put up with the ambiguities of being undocumented while accepting their role as the labor force of the United States, young people who have moved to this country show more signs of strain. The adults that continue to live in the Southeast tend to compare their lives here with life in the home countries and obviously perceive that the benefits of being here outweigh the problems. The adults relate to the adult world of work where questions of equality do not normally enter, since divisions of labor are well marked, while the young people are usually in school, rubbing elbows with other students in an artificial environment of equality. A focus group of middle school students, most of whom are ELL students that have been in the U.S. less than five years made these comments:

Luis: *.., cuando llegaba aquí se siente uno como solo, te sientes como que no los entiendes, te quieres comunicar pero no puedo, me siento como el único, pues.*

Azucena: *igual, (risa corta)*

Jorge: *Cuando come como que no tienes con quien sentarte, no, te sientes mal, verdad, cuando no tienes un hermano, si no tienes alguien te sientes mal...*

Luis: *when I arrived here, a person feels all alone, you feel like you don't understand them, you want to communicate and you can't, I feel like the only one, then.*

Azucena: *the same (short laugh)*

Jorge: *When you eat you don't have anyone to sit with, you know, you feel bad, right, when you don't have a brother, if you don't have anyone [friend] you feel bad...*

The individuals who made up this group have made remarkable progress in learning English, making friends, and adapting, each according to the time they have been here and their own unique set of circumstances. Yet, the majority continue to need ESL support, speak Spanish mostly among themselves, unanimously chose to do the interview in Spanish, and are obviously identified with other Hispanic immigrants. They form a provisional community with their own

language and cultural meanings. They share learning in school, learning of schooling in Galax, meaning-making of their new environment, and are a comfort to one another. They are all very conscious of being treated with discrimination in public places, labeled as “Mexicans,” regardless of where they are from, and are sensitive of the racial overtones that word has acquired in the South. And, they do not like it. They all have anecdotal incidences of having people tell them to “go back to Mexico,” “give us back our jobs,” “here comes Immigration,” “here come those Mexicans.”

I was impressed that these young males expressed the sense of feeling alone as they did. It is normally difficult to get them to reveal feelings, and interesting that the girls tended to be a little less forthcoming than the boys. It is very clear that the school experience is bittersweet for them. They are appreciative of the support they receive from teachers, seem to be conscious of their learning gains, enjoy some aspects of school, and express dreams of becoming professionals after high school. Yet, they are constantly in environments that make them feel uncomfortable. Occasionally, they react to insults in ways that their culture has taught young men to do—with their fists. And of this group, almost everyone stated their intention to return to their home countries after finishing their education.

School makes immigrant or minority kids aware of their differences, whether linguistic, social and economic. Just as the poem *Red Wagons* expresses so poignantly, similar objects can have very different uses, other objects may be unattainable, and the activities of family members can vary drastically, depending on one’s social or economic status. New vocabulary, such as the word “silly” in the poem, may be internalized by being very meaningful, even when the meaningfulness is painful. Children are learning, are acquiring new knowledge and skills, but the awareness of difference may lead a child to apply learning in ways that are harmful to one’s identity and sense of self-worth. The learning immigrant children acquire in school can be very different than becoming *concientizado*, or literate in the Freireian sense. For Freire, becoming literate is liberating, while the learning in schools can have an opposite effect. Some young people will follow the route of distancing themselves from their roots in pursuit of acceptance and in order to prosper in the U.S., as Richard Rodriguez; others may become hostile to the U.S. mainstream and tend to unite collectively with other community members who have similar experiences and reactions; some will choose the alternative lifestyle of gang membership. The artificial equality that public schools offer is one more factor that may lead young people to

dropout, to live marginalized lives, and not attain their potential.

### *Gender Issues*

The immigrant experience can radically alter the lifestyle of Hispanic women. The traditional roles for women in Mexico that included the expectation to have children, raise them, and be loyal servant/wives to often polygamous husbands are slowly giving way to allow young women to pursue careers alongside their male counterparts. However, despite many wonderful examples of highly successful women throughout public life, business, and across the span of careers available in Mexico and Central America, for the average female, careers are extremely limited, harassment is epidemic, and the opportunities to advance are few. While education is mostly free in public institutions in Mexico, many females do not have the encouragement from home nor the personal vision to obtain a college degree; in many instances the hidden costs of education impede young women from continuing their education. It is frequent that marriage and children lead to the decision to drop careers in order to maintain the home environment, especially among the middle and upper classes. Women almost always live at home until they marry, and generally marry young. Not to marry in a traditional sense is generally seen as a misfortune or failure, as is a childless marriage.

When Hispanic women emigrate to the U.S., they often go through a slow awakening of the power they have to control more of their lives and environment than they have ever known or been shown in the home countries. While women without college degrees in Mexico work in fields as different as housecleaning, tourism, service industries, secretaries, law enforcement, clerks, manufacturing, sales representatives, and miscellaneous office jobs, the pay is normally anemic, the hours are long, and the conditions in the workplace are less than ideal. Here, women without a middle-school education can find factory work, service industry work, work in restaurants, as maids or nannies, and earn nearly a thousand dollars a month. The money a woman without a college degree can earn in the U.S. is a huge motivation for her to find employment, even when she must balance work with home responsibilities. Along with income comes more independence for women—independence from male domination. In the case of the Garza family, for example, it would have been nearly impossible for Irene to live on her own in Mexico while maintaining her children on a salary she would make for whatever employment she might find. She would have almost have had to depend on her immediate family to help sustain her and the children in order to survive.

For the college educated, often they are unable to use their degrees in the U.S. and many seem quite happy to find employment here in service industries that would be beneath their rank in the home countries. Some eventually establish their own businesses, such as housekeeping, where they hire other Hispanic immigrants to clean houses that they contract. Usually these entrepreneurs start out as maids while learning English and how to run a similar business in the U.S.

For many women, both the college educated and the non-professional Hispanic women, the sexist atmosphere of Mexico and Central America is so vastly different from what they discover here as to render the home countries undesirable as a place to live and work. Simply walking down the street, purchasing groceries in the market, or all the activities women do brings them into contact with aggressive males, who make life unpleasant for many, if not most of them. The longer they are here, the less they are willing to place themselves under that bondage again.

Young girls who spend years in public schools in the U.S. tend to have a broader sense of possibilities, especially concerning obtaining a college degree. It is very satisfying to me to talk to Hispanic immigrant girls who have a clear vision to graduate from college and to become professionals, who come from families where no one has even a high school degree. There is also a notable difference in many Hispanic young women as far as being politically more sophisticated than their mothers, politics being an area generally left to men, although many men in the home countries show little interest.

Women are freer to experience new religions here in the U.S. and many of the women in this study have gone outside the boundaries of their traditional Catholicism, whether they convert or not. Some Hispanic women have found a new identity in religions as far from Catholicism as Islam, although they often lose ties with their families (Raghavan, 2006).

With all the gains for women in this country, domestic violence continues to plague the Hispanic immigrant families. Many of the Spanish language media have spots announcing the services available for women trapped in violent relationships. Women may be more emboldened to report acts of violence here than they are in Mexico, where the authorities are still very chauvinistic. On the other hand, when women do not feel safe because of immigration status, they may suffer in silence rather than risk deportation. Some of the women and children in Galax are allegedly victims of domestic violence, including rape and incest. AIDS continues to spread

disproportionately among Hispanic women.

*Pablo and Maribel Ramirez Family*

Since it was Saturday and the weather was nice, I decided to ride the Suzuki over to Galax for an interview with the Ramirez family. I packed the recorder and other materials carefully into the saddlebags, and had an enjoyable ride down through country roads, picking up 221 just south of Floyd and following it into Hillsville and Galax. The contrast of the neighborhood and the house where the Ramirez live with the trailer park and trailer of the Garza family was dramatic. The Ramirez's neat white frame home is located close to downtown Galax in a pleasant, well-kept residential area.

At the time of our interview, the Ramirez family had lived in Galax five years. They married young—Maribel was 15 and Pablo 18, after meeting at a school that was located half way between the village she grew up in and the small town where Pablo was born in the State of Nayarit, Mexico. Because of marrying young, they both only finished middle school. Maribel's father runs his own grocery store, while Pablo's dad is a farmer with lots of land and cattle. Besides working for his father, young Pablo worked as a driver in a mining company, saved his money and began to purchase his own land and cattle. Years later he acquired a large coffee farm, but had trouble making the payments. Pablo didn't want to sell any of his land to make the payments, and had a son and a new grandson he had not met living in Galax, so they decided to come to Galax in order to be with their son and grandson, and to work to pay off the loan. Pablo wanted to leave the other children with family, but Maribel was firm: if they were able to obtain visas for the whole family to travel, they would all come. If not, she would stay behind with the children in Mexico. They obtained the visas and the whole family came to Galax.

They started out in a tiny two-room trailer living crammed together with their 5 children about 40 minutes outside of town and with no car. Pablo worked in one of the furniture factories from 7-3 and joined Maribel and their older son working as apple packers in the evening hours, six days a week. They managed to save enough to purchase a car that was necessary for the trips to town, and have recently purchased the small house they live in just a couple of streets down from the Galax schools. In five years, they have done very well economically, as the purchase of the house indicates, and as they have paid off the debt for the land in Nayarit. Maribel also works in a textile factory, although has now been laid off. Pablo was doing farm work at the time of the interview, but later found employment working on highway construction, and is now working in



Northern Virginia, visiting the family once every two weekends.

For the Ramirez family, Mexico is home and they plan to return soon. They recently visited their families there, and Pablo stayed behind to work on fixing up their house for when they return. When asked why they continue to live in the U.S. since the goals for coming have been accomplished, the place of religion for this family began to surface. *“Ahora lo que nos une acá es la iglesia, por que no queremos dejar a los miembros que acuden, nos sentimos mal de dejarlos, que pase unos dos años que todo esté más solido,”* (Now what unites us here is the church, because we don’t want to leave the members who attend; we feel bad about leaving them; we’ll let another 2 years pass until everything is stronger.) The family started a church, beginning in the house where they lived and now rent a building for the meetings. *“Somos Evangélicos,”* (We are Evangelicals) says Maribel when asked what religion they profess. Although raised in the Catholic Church, and with their children baptized in the Catholic faith, they converted to Protestantism 11 years ago. One of their older sons is a Pastor. As what usually happens with family and friends in Mexico after people convert from Catholicism to another faith, the Ramirez had to face the disapproval of many. The length of time they have been involved as Evangélicos and the persistence in their service would indicate that the change is definitive.

Since they first arrived in Galax, the Ramirez family liked it a lot. For Pablo and Maribel, most of the people are very courteous and friendly, and they are attracted to the tranquility of the town and people. Being rural people, they are happiest in a rural atmosphere. The local family values and ties to the land transcend language and help this family feel they have some things in common with the folks in Galax.

For them, the hardest thing about being here is related to the issue of legalization, which affects everything from the ability to obtain driver’s licenses to the feeling of liberty to do what one pleases. Although they had visas when they first came, apparently they are currently out of status. This is an interesting dilemma for them as Evangélicos, since they are notorious sticklers for respecting the laws and authorities. Pablo and Maribel are aware that the children will not be able to study beyond high school here, due to the problem of immigration status, and want them to be able to have a college degree.

As for most all immigrants, language presented the biggest hurdle in the beginning. While it was suggested to them that they try to switch to English at home in order to speed up

their acquisition, Spanish continues to be the home language. Although Maribel was in agreement with the English practice at home, the children didn't like the idea because "*cuando vamos a México y escuchas la gente hablando ingles como que se sienten importantes*" (when we go to Mexico and you hear people speaking in English, it's like they feel important.) I observed that the youngest child spoke the most fluently in English and with the best accent, which is a typical pattern. The children have been in the schools five years now, so it is to be expected that the youngest make the greater gains. Luis, at 15, is still in ESL classes.

Another hardship for the adults was to see the children suffer the feeling of being alone in the beginning of their stay in Galax. "*Al principio ellos se sentían como que no tenían muchos derechos, ellos no hablaban inglés y se sentían inferiores a los demás. Carlos es el mayor de mis hijos y es él que más me decía que se sentía feo.*" (In the beginning, they felt like they didn't have many rights, they didn't speak English and they felt inferior to the others. Carlos, my oldest, is the one who used to always say that he felt really bad.) Now, the younger children say they have friends who are natives of Galax as well as with the Hispanic youth; they sit with friends from both communities, although even the youngest said he felt most at home eating lunch with the Hispanics, "*son de mi misma raza*" (they are of my same race). Luis sees his future in Mexico because, "*estoy más seguro en mi país, es mi idioma, mi gente, aquí todavía me confundo mucho, hay palabras que no las entiendo, para desarrollarme, en la escuela hay cosas que todavía no entiendo, es muy difícil, en mi país está mi lengua y la entiendo.*" (I am more confident in my country, it is my tongue, my people; here, I still get confused a lot, there are words I don't understand, it's very difficult, in my country is my language and I understand it.) When asked, all the Ramirez family say they feel most at home in México, feel more liberty and freedom. Only the youngest son says he sees his future "coming and going" between the two countries. One of the older sons is currently living in Mexico.

While Maribel frequently mentions the friendliness of the local people, the children comment on the negative treatment from some locals: "*A veces se han burlado de mí, me dicen 'taco,' son amigos que me fastidian, otros me dicen que me regrese a México.*" (Sometimes they make fun of me, they call me "taco," they are "friends" that bother me, others tell me to go back to Mexico.) The children speak of places where "*nos rechazan, y nos quedan mirando,*" (they reject us, and just stare at us.)

For Pablo and Maribel, the problem of education for the children is complex. Since there

is no school beyond high school near their home in Nayarit, the children would have to go as far away as the state capital to study. Maribel does not want to send the children off alone that far away, and has instead planted the idea of acquiring a small house in the town in Nayarit where they would study, in order that they could stay together.

The Ramirez family represents an entirely different portrait of an immigrant family when compared with the Garza family. Family, faith, peace, education, personal progress, national identity and love of the rural life are pillars that undergird not only their rhetoric, but also their lifestyle. They have an orderly lifestyle, despite the impacts of immigration on the family. They have used the immigrant route to better themselves financially with an aim of returning to Mexico. Their needs for immigrating were not for survival, as they were already prospering, slowly, in Mexico. Their faith is a motivator and a compass that serves to help them maintain their priorities. Despite their humble origins and the lack of a high school education, Pablo and Maribel have been able to make socioeconomic upward mobility, as well as impress upon their children the wisdom of staying in school, and the value of hard work and savings. For them, the U.S. has served the purpose that they saw in their dreams, and on the other hand, they fit the pattern that President Bush outlines for his immigration reform. That includes workers who come for a season and who return home. It has now been six years since they first arrived in Galax. Six years is a substantial period of time in the life of children. The longer the family continues to stay, the more likely it is that the children feel more at home here, and will more likely have a difficult period of adjustment when they return to Mexico.

The trips back to Mexico are crucial to the identity and well being of the children, and of the entire family. One of the hardest things for them being here is missing their families back in Nayarit, and they are happiest when they are there among them. The learning that occurs for the children on those trips home is arguably as great as the schooling they learn in the time they miss here. In other chats and in another interview, Luis speaks with intense emotion of his love of farming and cattle ranching, and his desire to work with his grandfather on his ranch. On those trips home to Mexico, he is able to balance the feeling of being confused here with reaffirming his identity there, “in my country, my language, [with] my people.”

*Institutions that impact the Hispanic immigrant community.*

I am intrigued with several factors that accompany the changes due to the presence of immigrants in Galax. One of those has to do with the use of space, or the changing use of space;

another is the place of religion in the accommodation of the immigrants to Galax, and the latter is the role of soccer in the community. As mentioned in chapter two, one of the changes in space involves the small Hispanic “*tienditas*” or small local stores that almost always are located in buildings that were built for other purposes in mind and from a few decades back. These stores



offer goods from the home country and services that are not normally found in other stores in town, or at least not all together under one roof. Bus tickets and traveling information, competing multicolor phone cards marketed specifically to call countries in Latin America, fax services, sometimes money orders and phone services are just some of the offerings in these *tienditas*. Some of the processed foods that immigrants are accustomed to in their home countries are available with the same brand names, and more and more I observe that new perishable products are arriving such as the typical sweet breads that are ubiquitous in Mexico. When I asked a distributor that was unloading at “El Progreso” where he was bringing the goods from, he said

Charlotte. The sweet bread comes from North Carolina also.

Although I visited several of these *tienditas* in Galax, which are now common in many areas of the South, I made it a habit to drop in regularly to El Progreso to pick up items we desired at home as well as to converse with Pepe and Carla. On these visits, I witnessed the vital role these *tienditas* play in the Hispanic community. Information is shared regarding employment, lay offs, salaries, health and medical needs, obtaining driver's licenses, immigration news and events, both national and local, special events or services in the area, the social issues members of the community are experiencing, people's travels and future plans among other things. Although some of the same goods are available in mainstream stores such as Wal-Mart and at cheaper prices, the *tiendita* serves as a space of community networking, and is preferred over the larger stores by many of the participants when it comes to goods from Mexico. It is also a public space that feels more like home, has people that look like themselves and where the language of home does not raise eyebrows. They are little islands of cultural identity in a sea of mainstream Anglo society.

As indicated in an earlier chapter, Protestant churches have taken the lead in adapting to seek to meet the needs and welcome the Hispanic community. Whether their motive is genuinely to live out the teachings of Jesus towards the less-fortunate and the stranger, or to proselytize, or a combination of both, their efforts seem to be well appreciated by the Hispanic community, even by those who do not convert. Many of the participants in this study have felt welcome in one or more of these local churches, and only have good things to say about them, despite the fact that it seems the majority do not actually change their traditional Catholicism for some form of Protestantism, at least while being in town. People like the Ramirez family came as Protestants, as have others. There are several Hispanic pastors in town, and it seems that all have their roots in the home country. There are some, like Pepe and Carla of El Progreso, who seem to have undergone an actual conversion from Catholicism to Protestantism while living in Galax.

Most all the Hispanics prefer their religious services in Spanish, and fortunately for them, there are several options. Catholics have a Spanish speaking priest who "does the best he can," according to one participant, although often the faithful travel down to North Carolina for mass with native Spanish speakers there. It seems to me that following the *tienditas*, the churches have become the greatest example of institutions involving the use of space that impact the immigrant community in a positive manner. Schools have a tremendous impact on the young immigrants—

a subject we will examine in the next chapter.

*Soccer.*

Soccer occupies much of the free time of the Hispanic males in Galax, just as it does in many areas of Latin America. It also involves the subversive use of space, as the largest municipal recreation area, Felt Park, almost always has a soccer game going or at least a few people playing soccer. On the weekends especially, matches with uniformed players compete with teams from other towns, usually in North Carolina in organized team play. This occurs constantly and has been cited as a cause of concern and discontent by members of the native Galax community. Soccer is huge in Mexico and throughout Latin America of course, but here in Appalachia, it seems that it is played with an intensity and dedication that speaks of something more. I believe soccer for male Hispanic immigrants involves affirmation of identity and meaning, and provides a release of energy and pent up emotion in response to the feeling of marginalization. It is a field of mutual acceptance from other players that look alike and speak a common language. In the schools, the soccer field is a forum where Mexicans commonly beat gringos. I witnessed several of the matches in which the opposing teams were almost all white, while the Galax team is almost all dark-skinned Hispanic (see Appendix B). I can only imagine what it means to the generally smaller, dark skinned Hispanics who struggle in classrooms and whom live marginalized in less than optimum conditions to play against and defeat white, taller teams. I think there is much to explore in thinking about soccer as identity, and the playing field as a place where Hispanic immigrant males sense some ownership. Foer's (2004) insightful book, *How Soccer Explains the World*, could have another chapter added based on the role of soccer in the immigrant community in the U.S.

Two other institutions that impact the Hispanic community are Spanish language newspapers and radio. There are several newspapers distributed in Galax, which are published in North Carolina, and there is one, *Notihispano*, that is prepared locally by a couple of professionals from Colombia, and for the local area, although it is printed in Miami. The papers offer advice for family relations, news and advice concerning immigration, medical advice, and even advice for individual and family economy. Some offer news from a variety of countries from Latin America, and all have a section on sports. Local businesses regularly advertise and often include names and photos of employees who speak Spanish. There is a locally sponsored hour of Christian radio on the local station in Galax and a secular station that arrives from

Greensboro, although most of the programming is produced in California.

### Concluding Thoughts

In summing up this chapter, there are many very different profiles and stories among the immigrant community. Some families are very dysfunctional, while others conserve a strong and united family base. Most seem to dream of returning to their home countries, while continuing to live, work, and study in the U.S. There are many reasons Hispanics immigrate from Mexico or Central America to the United States as conditions in the home countries seem to continue to deteriorate for the poor in these years of neoliberal economic policy. Language and immigration laws and enforcement are two of the greatest challenges and concerns facing them, once they survive the journey. They often arrive indebted, and usually multiple family members must work and often with multiple jobs in order to survive. Galax has been very receptive to the Hispanic community, especially through local churches, although Hispanic youth are affected by discrimination, rejection, isolation, and racism. Hispanic women especially have many more opportunities and freedoms in the U.S. than in their home countries and are often reluctant to leave. Poor Hispanic immigrants appropriate space for themselves, in a corner store, in a local park, a newspaper or a spot on the radio, in a trailer park or in a mainstream neighborhood. Within those appropriated spaces in Galax, they exercise their language and identities, and create some of the similar atmosphere they knew in their original communities, as Mexico makes a home in Appalachia. With this background on the Hispanic immigrants, we can now turn our attention to the schools.

## CHAPTER FIVE—THE IMPACT OF IMMIGRATION IN THE SCHOOLS PART ONE



This chapter and the following one are focused on the schools. I open with a short vignette, and then attempt to narrate the evolution of the impact of Hispanic immigrants in the schools, while addressing the appropriate research questions for this chapter. The research questions guide the discussion. This chapter examines the data from the participating teachers and administrators. The following chapter examines the students' responses, includes conclusions, and offers some suggestions for improving educational opportunities for Hispanic students.

### *Part One-The Perspective of Teachers and Administrators*

#### *Setting*

For those unaware of just how significant the demographic changes are that have occurred in the small town of Galax, the entrance to the high school provides a graphic as clue. The weatherworn sign of greeting and instructions for visitors is written in English and Spanish.





Upstairs in room 206, surrounded by images from Mexico including murals by artist Diego Rivera and a hand drawn image of the Virgin of Guadalupe, ESL teacher Elizabeth Stringer interacts seamlessly with the thirteen students in both English and Spanish. The students are reading from an English reader by Gary Soto called *Petty Crimes*, which includes a number of non-standard Spanish slang words from the California Latino experience. Miss Stringer asks questions in English and more often than not, the students respond in Spanish. She fields the answers and provides feedback in English. When there is a breakdown in communication, either another student provides mediation or Miss Stringer switches briefly into Spanish. This dual-language classroom functions efficiently, and the two languages cohabit remarkably well, as if they grew up together, complimentary, rather than being in competition. The emphasis is on the meaning of the text, and the students are amused at the narrative as it unfolds. The atmosphere is comfortable, students are mostly engaged in the text, and respond with surprise and laughter immediately to the presence of words such as “la guera” (Blonde), “bato” (dude), “chola” (half-breed), “loca” (a crazy girl), “gabacho” (non-Hispanic). The story is based on the California poor Hispanic experience in an urban setting—a far cry from the language and realities of rural Galax, and for that matter, the rural experience in Mexico and Central America, the places of origin of the families of the majority of the students.



Just a couple of blocks down the hill in the elementary school, a similar greeting in both languages is posted on the front door. Amanda Loy leads her Pre-K class entirely in English, although most of the children appear to be Hispanic, with three towheads that stand out, in a class with nine girls and six boys. When the teacher calls on a Hispanic student by name, she uses the Hispanic pronunciation, although she does not speak Spanish. As Miss Loy moves from whole class activities to small group work, the sounds of Spanish are heard bubbling out of one of the groups. The students in that group interact in Spanish mostly, regardless of the presence of at least one student who obviously does not speak Spanish, and who seems to be unaffected by what he doesn't understand. He interacts in English and the Spanish speakers respond to him in English. Many of the Spanish speakers have very good accents in English and a reasonable command of the language. The bell rings and the children change tables for the next activity. Miss Loy leads them into practice with the difficult transfer from Spanish to English of the vowels "e" and "i". It is impressive to watch the students code switch to negotiate meaning with their Spanish-speaking peers and then back and forth into English as they respond to Miss Loy or to monolingual English speakers. It is equally impressive to observe the monolingual teacher and students work together with the Spanish-speakers as they learn and practice previously learned material. The interaction is comfortable; students are at ease, and are very engaged in the activities.

On the third floor of the elementary school, Ali Fletchum calls out in a loud voice, "los verbos, los verbos", what verb do you remember? Hands are raised everywhere as 25-30 fourth grade students, sitting at desks and on the floor, respond as they are called upon. "Comer!" says one girl. "What does it mean?", almost shouts Miss Fletchum. "To eat!" someone calls out in a similar tone and volume. A series of Spanish verbs are reviewed in this manner, along with

pronouns, and miscellaneous “facts” from the Spanish-speaking world. When a child responds incorrectly the whole class is given the chance to give the correct answer and do so in unison, loudly! Soon the class is split into groups for another review activity, this time in the form of a game. Although the individuals called on initially answer many of the questions incorrectly, the majority of the class demonstrates they know the correct answer when called upon as a whole class. The enthusiasm continues to pour from the teacher, and the students respond in kind.

While no truly communicative acts are observed, and English is by far the dominant language in the classroom, the mostly indigenous Galax students are learning some vocabulary and building blocks for second language development for the future. According to the principal and Miss Fletchum, the Hispanic students benefit from this class since they have a chance “to shine.” This is the first year for this specially funded class, and by all reports it is highly valued despite being out of the core curriculum. Indigenous parents report that their children frequently speak Spanish at home. For the Hispanic students, it is possibly the first written material they have seen for children in their native language, and the first chance to write in Spanish. In the assimilationist approach to learning that they are subjected to, the value for the Hispanic children of this short Spanish class is difficult to comprehend. All parties consulted hope that the funding will continue to make this class possible in the future.

In her room on the second floor of the high school, Corina Hughes, a native of the Dominican Republic, teaches all of the Spanish classes. For the first few years when her family lived here, she was a stay at home Mom. Although active in her local church and schools, she says that until she began to teach in the school she really had not been aware of the depth of the impact of the Hispanic community in town. She has written and filmed a video in Spanish for parents and students as a means of introducing the families to the key school personnel from all three schools and to the key components of school life. In it she relates to the parents as an immigrant and the suppositions one carries over from the home country and the differences in the schools in Galax, and offers advice for helping their children have a successful school experience. The video is available to all the Hispanic families from all three schools.

There are 1350 students in all three schools; 548 in elementary, 316 in middle school, and 438 in high school. Over 52% of the elementary students are considered “economically disadvantaged,” which happens to be where the largest group of Hispanic children is located. There were 228 students labeled as Limited English Proficiency (LEP) in 2005. Most of those

students are Hispanic, but the number does not include all Hispanics, as a number are no longer considered LEP students (VDOE, retrieved May 5, 2006).

*What has been the adaptation of the schools as they have attempted to deal with the influx of Hispanic children?*

The following narrative and short commentary attempt to answer this question. According to Sonia Truitt, the first Hispanic child was a little girl, who came to the elementary school in Carroll County in 1987-1988. In her comments about that experience, many of the issues and concerns are hinted at that are mentioned in the interviews in the Galax schools and also in the literature related to schools and communities with new immigrant populations. Sonia<sup>4</sup> says,

*She spoke no English at all, and she was in my class. And it was just a real struggle, what do you do? How are you supposed to communicate? How do you deal with this situation? And nobody knew how. We found a lady in the community who spoke Spanish and they encouraged her to come in and help translate her lesson, but probably more than that was [how] to help a seven-year old child deal with providing information to her family and taking care of her sisters and brothers and any extended family that might be with them as far as food. You could see them in the grocery store, and she is telling them how much everything is and she is telling them how to go about doing everything, and it was just a lot of pressure and a lot of stress on this little bitty girl...living in this world with what little bit of English skill that she had.*

Her rhetorical questions of ‘what to do, how do you communicate, how do you deal with this situation’ have doubtlessly been echoed in schools throughout the Southeast as the recent wave of immigrants have descended upon communities with traditionally white and white/black populations. The problems of mapping out a strategy of pedagogy, issues of curriculum, problems with communication with non-English speakers are skills not being taught in teacher education in Schools of Education in the region. Teachers, like Sonia, have few skills or tools to “deal with this situation.” Perhaps the most haunting of all is the comment, “*and nobody knew how.*” Neither are administrators well equipped to provide clear and decisive guidance when these situations suddenly develop in communities.

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<sup>4</sup> This quote is repeated from Chapter Three for a different level of analysis.

The first step at finding a solution back then: “We found a lady in the community who spoke Spanish and they [administrators?] encouraged her to come and help translate her lessons...” Galax elementary followed a similar approach at the beginning of the influx of non-English speaking students in the early 1990s. Current Spanish teacher, Corina Hughes, was one of those recruited to help. In 1996, one of the second grade teachers who had several Spanish-speaking children contacted her, well before any ESL teachers were hired, to help “once or twice a week, whatever I wanted to or whatever I could.” Later, when she became the Spanish teacher at the high school in 1999, still with no ESL teachers, she was pulled out of her classroom frequently to translate for various situations and needs on campus.

*First things first.*

But very quickly, the school realized that the physical and social needs of the immigrant child outweighed the issues in school, and extended to the little girl’s family, also non-English speakers. Over and over in this study, the physical and social needs of the children, students, and their families came to the forefront, at times almost forcing educators to have to make a new list of priorities as they dealt with the issues that arose. Elementary Principal Alvin Davidson: “...*for me, as the principal of this school, [my priority is] to make sure that the safety of my children or my students come first over everything...Making sure they are fed, making sure they are warm, making sure they have a home*” with heat in the winter are concerns of this caring group of educators. The immigrants need to be able to purchase food, negotiate basic living functions in order to survive, must obviously come before educational considerations. These are some of the comprehensive issues schools and communities are dealing with when significant immigrant populations that are largely non-English speaking arrive on their doorsteps. The responses must also come from the greater school community, from within the community at large as traditional boundaries of different institutions blur and crossover. Resources must be pooled, and innovative responses need to come from all sectors of the local stakeholders. Again, the question can be raised: how are teachers and educators being given the tools to respond adequately to the demands they face when an immigrant population appears in their midst?

Sonia mentions the stress on this seven-year old. Immigrant children live with stress from all sides—from school pressures related to learning the curriculum, learning a new philosophy of learning, learning how schools in their new country function, relating to the indigenous population of peers, and then returning home to relate to families, usually in the native language

and within the cultural norms of the home country. Immigrant children normally have significant identity problems, and it is a mystery where each child will choose to relate in the teenage years, whether with the parent's native culture, or if they will internalize the assimilationist route, which often means turning their back on their traditional roots to some degree or other. This little girl, like so many other similar children, gradually take on the role of adult, bridging the gaps between the indigenous community through language and cultural mediation, while the parents must adapt to having a little child lead them. This situation obviously puts enormous power in the hands of children and creates potential additional stress on family relationships.

*Some adaptations schools made to accommodate immigrant students.*

By all accounts, the Galax schools have undergone many changes as they endeavored to adapt strategies that offered promise as they worked with their growing immigrant population over the past eight years or so. There was a time when all the Spanish-speaking children were put together, *“not because of a racial thing, but because they thought it might be in the best interest of those children. It took a few years to figure out, that no, that is not in their best interest”* (Sonia Truitt). When they realized that this strategy wasn't working, they begin to disperse the immigrant population into regular classrooms in a fully immersion approach, but there were not any ESL teachers, and the challenge was too great for both students and teachers. In the elementary school, students were sent to the reading specialist, Mrs. Truitt, although she didn't speak Spanish nor did she have any training in ESL. She ordered materials and worked on vocabulary with the children sent to her. Only later were ESL teachers hired, along with aides to work alongside the students in a combination of pullout programs and immersion. From the first child, the elementary school now has over 120 Hispanic children, or just over a fifth of the student body, and the numbers appear to have leveled out in the past three years. In the three schools, the growth in the number of LEP students over a twelve- year period is significant.

Table 4

*Galax Schools Demographics**Limited English Proficiency (LEP) Students*

Galax Schools combined	2005	2004	2003	2002	2001	2000	1999	1998	1997	1996	1995	1994	1993
LEP students	228	171	173	132	128	124	104	106	75	49	29	11	6

There are currently two ESL teachers, Elizabeth Stringer in the middle and high school, and Jealynn Coleman in the elementary, both hired in 2001, along with an aide who may or may not be ESL trained and/or Spanish speaking. Both Stringer and Coleman also speak Spanish, an enormous plus for the learning and social needs of the students and their parents. There are also migrant aide workers who fill in when the federal funding is available. When the implied question arises as to why it took so long to hire ESL teachers, funding issues are mentioned. I would speculate that with no prior experience with a changing foreign population, it undoubtedly took some time for the needs to be more clearly defined. It is also likely that to address the issue implied change, with the past, and it is often difficult to promote innovative change, especially considering the funding issues involved. The assimilationist approach to educating the immigrant children is also likely a factor in the decision-making.

Jealynn Coleman says that when she was hired, there were a little less than 100 ESL students at the elementary school. She was frequently called out of her classroom to go translate and it seems to her that the school did not really know what to do with ESL teachers and an ESL program. It took a while to iron things out. Elizabeth Stringer's experience at the high school and middle school is similar to Coleman's at the elementary. In the beginning,

*I was told to teach the kids English, inform the faculty[about] laws and 'best practices' when dealing with ESL kids, and also I was assigned an alternative math course. This was pretty much a dumping ground for ESL kids and kids who did not qualify for special education services, but couldn't handle a regular math class. My math class now is exclusively for ESL kids. Also, my first year, I spent more time in classes translating for*

*kids than actually teaching English. Now my aides [bilingual] assist in classes and they come to me to learn English and get further help with content area classes.*

Besides the ESL instruction, Coleman and Stringer have been vital cultural mediators between teachers, administrators and the immigrant students. A good bit of their time is spent in working with other teachers to help them understand the challenges the immigrant English language learners are facing, to interpret certain behaviors and attitudes, as well as to offer suggestions on learning strategies that may be more successful for that population. Stringer has developed a short course on Hispanic culture that has been offered periodically and that other teachers value highly. She has also taught a very short introduction to Spanish for educators from time to time on the different campuses. Both of these teachers speak passionately about the students and their needs, and occasionally manifest frustration with the lack of understanding they see in a few of their colleagues. There are particular issues that are of great concern to them, one being that some teachers use retention as a means of trying to mediate language deficiencies. Another concern that came up with several participants, including the two ESL teachers, was some attitudes and policies negatively affecting the immigrant students at the middle school. A further discussion of these concerns will follow later in this chapter.

Schools have become centers for the Hispanic community's needs, such as translations of documents, filling out forms, interpretations between individuals and agencies to such an extent that the elementary school made a policy for people with those needs to come after 1:00, when they had personnel available to help. They also depend on help from the limited bilingual community with events like the open-house night, and for translations. According to Coleman, the school needs more people who can help with the demand for translations.

### *Improvisation.*

Teachers have had to improvise strategies for giving instruction and also for grading. One middle school teacher said,

*There are lots of times in my class I will go to this one Hispanic who is very bilingual and say to him, will you please go make sure that these other three know what I am saying?*

*Now, if that is called setting the rules for it, I do it.*

Another says that she puts them in a seating arrangement where those that she knows speak Spanish sit next to someone who is weaker in English so they can translate. Another teacher says,



*I watch them very closely to make sure they are what I think is, on task, and if I am at the board demonstrating, I will go so far and stop and say nothing for a moment until they have time. When I had the aide in my room, I would stop a lot and give her time to translate to them.*

Some teachers acknowledge being reluctant to shift from individual based to collaborative learning activities, and have seen the need “*to become more tolerant*” of group sharing dynamics like collaborating on answers. Some of the teachers struggle with cooperative tasks:

*For adaptation, I have become more tolerant of noise, and I have become more tolerant of group work. I know around here we call it groups, but to me it's still cooperative cheating.*

One of the more positive adjustments teachers have made could be summed up by saying that they have learned not to assume students know something that they may not. Usually, that information has to do with knowledge of mainstream culture or with knowledge of national facts and history. The social studies teacher acknowledges having some bad classes where he had assignments based on knowledge he realized later that some of the immigrant students do not have, or at least, that he cannot assume they have. This includes such basic information as Thomas Jefferson, George Washington, the National Anthem or the National bird. He says he tries to fit in the new information into larger perspectives. A math teacher says she has learned that she cannot skip steps in the instructional process like she once did. She writes down the instructions rather than only giving them verbally. She makes lists and provides more examples to prove that the directions work. When asked, they acknowledge that because of having to rethink their teaching, *they are probably better teachers as a result of having the immigrants present*. Principal, Alvin Davidson, definitely believes his teachers are better teachers for the same reason. It is a tribute to the teachers that they have devised means to adapt to their changing student populations without having the background knowledge of how to work with immigrant students.

Regarding grading:

*... unless they can speak the language, they have really got a problem... so you have to change your grading rules somewhat... I don't feel like I could grade them with the exact same grading rules that I do everybody else...and be (interrupted by another teacher) I do the same. They give us the ten-point grading scale for special ed students. I do a ten-point*

*scale for the ESL students as well. Interviewer: And this is your own rubric that you've come up with? Response: My rule. Another teacher says, You know you have got to do some stuff a little bit different you know.... So, if you see they are working and working hard you know...you try to help them out. I have had to get a little bit more tolerant and more open to alternative type tests and alternative assignments too. I have just... put a presentation together for this chapter...[where students] work with the others...and... had pretty good success with that, where if I had just handed them the test I gave the other ones, they wouldn't have done, couldn't have done any of it.*

Another math teacher says that she doesn't change her grading scale, that all abide by the same scale. Both of the ESL teachers expressed concern about some of the testing practices occurring in the middle school, where allegedly, English language learners are getting F's on spelling tests for native students when in their expert opinion as ESL teachers, the students are performing at a very acceptable level for the time they have been in U.S. schools.

*Language or language and culture.*

Among all the participants, the issues related to language are the most prominent as being the cause of changes in practice and policy, and also the area of greatest concern. A middle school teacher focus group had the following to say:

*The ones that have been here a long time that speak English are doing really well, you know, pretty well. The ones that can't speak the language do not have a chance, one chance at all on the test [Standards Of Learning (SOLs)]. Just can't read it or can read enough to get through two or three questions and just wear completely out. If they can't read it, they can't pass it. It's that simple.*

Another concern in the classroom is when some students don't understand a question, instead of translating the question, often the more bilingual student simply gives the other student the answer. "You don't know if that Spanish population is even doing what you are asking them sometimes, which is a little frustrating." One teacher says that she has learned to go slower, giving more time for the English language learners to process the information, and that she uses more examples on the board. For Principal Alvin Davidson, language is the most significant challenge the school and the children face.

ESL teacher Jealynn Coleman agrees that the primary challenge is how to approach teaching students who don't speak English. For the library, a lot of bilingual books have been

purchased, and the librarian notes that those who don't read English read the Spanish sections, with maybe a look at the English translations. Virtually all of the participants testified to the enormous difference in language achievement when the Spanish-speakers begin in Pre-K or kindergarten rather than those who begin school in the later grades. My observations and interviews with students confirmed that conviction. All of the language teachers see the need to have more ESL teachers on staff. If an objective observer considers that there are over 100 LEP students in the elementary school with one ESL instructor who has a room the size of a closet, and who in some instances may see a student once a week, it is easy to see their concerns.

It seems that those who are not language teachers are reluctant to accept the research-based facts that to become truly competent in a second language requires more time, usually between four and seven years, than they are willing to concede. Also, there is a strong bias against using Spanish or making use of a bilingual approach to learning manifest in the interviews. Reportedly, many of the teachers have a problem with the children speaking Spanish even at home or with their friends. This prejudice, as prejudice is wont to be, does not seem to be based on research based knowledge, but rather arbitrary choice in a belief about assimilation, with roots possibly in nationalistic historiography, the current culture of empire, and fears of race-based politics. The question doesn't seem to be, "how do immigrant students who are English language learners learn best?" but "how can we get them English (Americanized?) as fast as possible?" One of the implications is that when they learn English they can begin to learn in our schools. Once again, standardized testing aggravates the imperative to learn English fast.

Another challenge for the schools and a concern voiced by most of the participants is the custom of many Mexicans to return to their hometowns in mid-year, from as early as late November and into December returning later in January. Many of the children miss school for weeks at a time. Obviously, the needs of the schools to keep on schedule is a priority for them, and the absence of a significant group of students over several weeks creates hardships for teachers and administrators when those students return. The standardized tests bring further pressure on teachers and administrators, but also on students and parents to "catch up" to where they need to be in order to keep in step with the planned school curriculum. For English language learners, a break of weeks in the middle of the school year can affect their language acquisition as well, and might tend to weaken the students' chances of qualifying for higher education.

On the other hand, how can one limit the value of the cultural and community needs of returning to the hometown during traditional festival periods, and the opportunity to reconnect with family, friends, community, culture, and language? How valuable an experience might it be for a Hispanic child, who to one degree or another feels some sense of marginalization in a foreign school and culture, to return to where he or she looks like the majority of the people, and where the linguistic sounds heard at home are ubiquitous, and to eat at grandmother's table? The holistic gains for students on these annual treks back to hometowns may exceed temporary setbacks in schooling. Schools are faced with competing needs and the answers may not be easy. Teachers and administrators are frequently befuddled and often disappointed at the choices Hispanic immigrants make and the behavior they exhibit, even those who are their most ardent advocates. The befuddlement is almost always based on different cultural values or characteristics. Once again, the challenges represented by this degree of otherness are possible to address in well-planned curriculum and are thus of a nature that Schools of Education could play a significant role in mitigating.

A significant difference also surfaces between the language concerns that are utmost in the minds of most teachers and administrators and the cultural aspects that most foreign language teachers know to be enormous factors in sustained successful education for immigrant students. That is to say that most teachers and administrators attribute to language barriers the biggest problem they face with providing an adequate and acceptable (as measured by standardized testing) educational experience for the immigrants. The foreign language teachers know how significant are the cultural factors because they participate in the befuddlement and disappointment in decisions and some behavior by Hispanic immigrants *despite the fact that they speak the language with a level of fluency, are familiar with many cultural realities, and seem to relate well with them*. Even Corina Hughes, from an upper class background in the Dominican Republic, often struggles to relate to the immigrants from Guatemala, Honduras, and Mexico, who generally have a different level of social capital than her own. An event like what occurred May 1, 2006, can shake the foundations of the belief systems of all parties. I will discuss those events in the last chapter.

One of the strategies that the schools adopted became one of the more humorous things that happened relating to language, but could have had more serious consequences. In order to provide the Hispanic children and parents with all of the memos and notices sent home in

Spanish, Principal Davidson purchased software that translates English to Spanish. Several of the notices that went out included words that have a double meaning in the translation, with pornographic overtones, and were quite upsetting to some of the Hispanic parents. One included a translation relating to throwing paper on the bus on the vehicle of a driver whose last name was Spears. The electronic translator translated the message that kids were throwing spears on the bus and quite naturally, some parents were very alarmed. I noticed several posted messages that had very poor and in some cases misleading information in the translations. There was some learning that occurred as a result for the Principal and others as they began to reflect on their own use of English, and how dependent we all become on speaking in nuance or slang terms. To take the learning another step would be to ponder just how complex it can be to completely be at home in a second language and culture.

Another change that the focus group of teachers was in agreement about is the noise level in the classrooms. In fact, the first thing they mentioned when asked about how the school has changed is “*it has got louder.*” They all openly talked of how difficult it has been to adjust to having aides and students translating continually in the classroom.

*We were brought up where you have a nice, quiet classroom, it's a good learning environment, and that is gone, because you have your English speaking students, you know, and then you have the people who are bilingual over there explaining everything to the ones that can't speak any English, and you are hoping that everybody gets some of it you know... You can never have quiet, complete quiet like 30 years ago you would have. You don't even know if the Spanish population is even doing what you are asking them sometimes, which is a little frustrating. And, so it's changed. It's changed the dynamics of things. Another teacher says, There was absolutely no quiet in that room. **I thought I was going crazy.** It took me a few days to get adjusted to being able to speak with all of that talking going on. And to this point in time, I think that...the biggest challenge I have is being able to do what I am supposed to be doing with all of this noise going on in my room.*

When pressed as to how that works and how they set the rules for translating and explaining, the reply from one teacher was:

*I don't know how to set the rules for it, because I can't understand, I don't understand what they are saying anyway.*

Teachers are obviously challenged in many ways when a foreign population rather suddenly comes into the midst of their classrooms.

*How do various participants describe their degree of comfort/satisfaction with the adaptations they are making?*

It is obvious from the teachers' remarks above that many of the changes have not been comfortable for them. They are bothered by the "noise," distracted by the communication going on between students and aides and among peers over reasons of language, and "frustrated" by many issues related to language and communication. They are frustrated when students come into their classes from sixth grade on, not having been in schools in the U.S. as mainstream students and with little to no knowledge of U.S. History (from an American perspective) and knowledge that is in the mainstream public consciousness. Teachers feel they have a "language barrier" to deal with, immigrant students lack background knowledge most mainstream children have, plus the normal challenges of introducing new knowledge. As mentioned earlier, it is hard for teachers to deal with absences, and with students who come and go during the school year. Every year, some leave and never return. The challenges for teachers who are instructing immigrant children are manifest in the language that they use in the interviews. As I worked through the data and noted common themes, I noticed certain words appeared frequently. In making frequency word count the words "frustrated" and "frustrating" appeared quite often, and were implied more frequently. The only other word that surpasses in frequency counts in the transcriptions is the word "problem," which appears over 50 times. Language related terms round out the list of words that appear most often related to the question related to comfort and satisfaction, and as stated above, there often is a connection between language and problems or frustration.

One of the more interesting and encouraging bits of information that came out in this study is the overwhelming appreciation all participating educators expressed for the Hispanic children. Over and over again, and in many ways, the participating educators revealed how the Hispanic students had essentially won their respect, their admiration, and I think it is safe to say, won their hearts.

*The Hispanic kids we are getting around here they are high-class kids. Their folks are hard workers. [They] came all the way up here not speaking the language to make a living, they are high-class kids most of them,* says a middle school teacher. Another says,

*there are a couple I really do love [gives a child's name], and we have such a good thing going you know, and he will not go down that hallway unless you know [he says something to her]. [Another teacher breaks in] I find most of them like that. [Another breaks in] I love to death, but [another interruption]. Interviewer: So you are pulling for them is what you are saying? Female Participant: We all are. Male Participant: Shoot yeah. Female Participant: I think we all are. Male Participant: They have added something. Female Participant: It's not that I approve of everything they do or that I appreciate what they do.*

The two virtues observed in the Hispanic population most often mentioned and appreciated by the Anglo participants are “hard working” and “family” commitment.

Every narrative needs an antagonist, however, and this one has a few. Some of the participants spoke openly and indirectly about a few individuals among the teacher corps, administrators, and parents who have prejudiced attitudes against the Hispanics. Some of the comments attributed to those people probably fall under the category of racism. Jealynn Coleman had this to say:

*Some of my students even though they are elementary students, they are very smart to knowing when a person doesn't like them because of their skin color. I had a student this year she had her hair dyed blond, and she told me if I could just have blue contacts put on I would look American.*

Through intermediaries, I requested interviews with some of the teachers reported to have prejudice against the Hispanics, and they refused. I will return to this theme of prejudice when the participating students have their say.

Virtually all of the eight teachers who participated in the study indicated that there had been some racial tension and even violence between a few members of the tiny African American community and the Hispanic students in the earlier years of the Hispanic presence. One of the interviewees described quite graphically what happened in one incident where a few students ganged up on one Hispanic child and inflicted significant damage, right on school grounds. In a non-recorded interview, one administrator indicated that there was one boy who was the instigator, and most of the problems went away after he graduated. Apparently, there were several such instances, which no one wants to talk much about, and most everyone, including the students, indicate that those problems have been dealt with and that now there is a

good relationship between those two minorities on campus. Corina Hughes noticed a big difference in the few years that she was away from the Galax community and when she returned in 2004 as the Spanish teacher. She says that in 1999 the black girls would have never been seen with an Hispanic guy, but that now interracial friendships and dating are very common. Mrs. Coleman said that some of her former students have returned from time to time and told her of continuing problems among these two minorities in the middle and high schools. One parent told her that his daughter was getting picked on in the middle school and that she was afraid to go to school. For the rest, outside of a few exceptions, teachers and administrators feel that the native Galax students get along very well with the Hispanic students. The students have a little different take on that, which I address in the student section.

The ESL teachers and language teachers perceive a need for more bilingual staff and for more ESL teachers to help with the load. Mrs. Coleman especially seems to feel overwhelmed with the needs of over a hundred students, who she feels need ESL instruction more than just a few minutes a week. These dedicated teachers are all concerned with colleagues who they feel are not well informed on issues of language learning, the challenges immigrant children face, and with some arbitrary decision making that could seriously affect the children. An example of that concern is over the issue of holding a child back due to his language development, or grading a child who is an English language learner with exactly the same scale as a native student. They would also like to see funding priorities address some of these areas of concern. The middle school focus group concurred:

*If I have a complaint with the whole system, it's that they don't put these kids who do not speak any English into a class, teach them some basic English first so they have a clue what we are talking about in the classroom, rather than to expect every teacher to learn Spanish so we can get it across to them. They need something before they are just totally turned loose within the system.*

*How does learning occur in and outside of schools?*

This question is fraught with complexity and needs to be divided in several ways as experienced through the perspective of each participant, but also each group of participants before being synthesized. The question is not necessarily directed at the students, as was the original notion for this study, framed by a statement similar to "How do the immigrant students learn inside and outside schools?" I was interested to study how people in both communities learn from the



experience of living, studying (whether teaching, administrating, or in the role of student), playing, and worshipping in proximity with each other, realizing that learning is occurring on all sides of this equation. In this section, I look at learning and how it occurs for the people in each category of participants. As we will see, some of what is learned as fact is erroneous.

As I began to work through the data related to this question, I realized that each participant experienced learning in unique ways and that often the role a participant plays in or outside of schools influences “how” the learning occurs. For example, almost all of the teachers experienced most of their learning inside the schools through interaction with students, but also some through instruction. The Principal experienced most of his learning by observation, some by interaction, and by discussions with teachers. One of the teachers, Elizabeth Stringer, through her role outside the confines of the school, but very much inside the local community as an engaged citizen, advocate, and church member, experienced much of her learning through interaction. The local community is learning through people like Elizabeth Stringer, Jealynn Coleman, Corina Hughes, and others who are more knowledgeable of the Hispanic culture and language and who are cultural mediators constantly. They are often consulted by locals and they are often the instigators of influencing people’s thinking and add to the knowledge base of locals. Even non-Spanish speakers like Alvin Davidson and Sonia Truitt help educate the local community through the knowledge they have grasped through their experience at schools.

The local community also learns through observation and interaction with the Hispanic community, as well as, unfortunate as it is, through the often biased media, which includes a public vehicle in the *Galax Gazette* called the “Hot Line”. The students, both native and immigrant, who I will address in the student section of this chapter, obviously experience much of their learning through instruction in the classroom, and also still, within the schools, but outside the classroom they experience much learning through interaction. Often, those learning encounters outside the classroom, whether at school or outside, are very likely where the majority of learning occurs.

The bottom line is, there is a great deal of learning happening when two very distinct groups who knew very little about each other, and who speak different languages begin to share common space. Perhaps much of the learning is not what we would prefer in an ideal world, and no doubt a good deal of it is flawed through the lens that the participants use to experience learning. Some of the learning seems to be cut off in the bud, as participants began to ask

questions and reflect on an issue but accept an answer that fits in with flawed and/or biased prior beliefs or perceptions. There are amazing and frequent opportunities for taking advantage of teachable moments for all members of this community, yet through scheduling demands, prior-established expected outcomes (such as standardized testing), the habitual patterns that people adopt as they live their lives, along with no doubt many other factors, these experiences go by without coming to fruition. A chance to develop deeper learning of self and the other slips away, with the loss of an expected outcome from that learning of a somewhat more harmonious and bi-cultural world.

From the teachers' perspective, as stated above, much of the learning comes through interaction with the immigrant students. The kind of learning teachers have experienced could be divided into two main areas. The first area would be what teachers (all Anglo-Americans) have learned about their Hispanic students, while the second area would be what they have learned about pedagogy related to their Hispanic students. It is important to note that the following information is based on data produced by the Anglo teacher participants—that is what the participants **said** that they had learned about the Hispanic immigrants, and **not** what the researcher would consider factual. In fact, some of the things learned are contradictory, as the following quotes and paraphrases from **teachers and administrators** illustrate:

*English language learners sometimes use language as an excuse. They say they don't understand and sometimes teachers think they do. On issues of gender: Girls are not expected to work. They are expected to get married, have children, and raise a family. They only go so far in school and then school becomes less important. There is no pressure on them to go to college or to a higher education situation from here.*

On the same theme, the Principal had learned the opposite:

*"I think maybe the girls, more so than boys, are expected to finish school."*

*They (Hispanics) are warm and they like each other, and enjoy hanging out together. Soccer is one of the most important things in the lives of the boys. As a culture, they value work over education, and work over sports. When they don't know an answer they tend to drop their heads, hunker down, and wait for what is going to happen. They are not combative. They have strong family ties, and stick together. They see things in public places as community property rather than individual property. As related to the schools, they have very trusting parents, much more so than most natives of the area. That is to*

*say that they trust their children to the schools, and don't worry when things happen, like a child missing the bus. Parents do not question or challenge decisions or actions by the school authorities. Most parents have less initiative than their U.S counterparts to approach teachers and administrators. A young Hispanic boy is not going to tell on another one or anybody else.*

Pedagogically, **teachers** have learned the following: *It is necessary to repeat facts continuously for students to either catch on or to remember. In the case of math, "numbers the same, numbers the same."* (The response of one child who when asked by the math teacher how it was that he excelled in math while failing most other classes.) *It is necessary to place new information in larger contexts and not assume the students know basic facts about subjects like social studies. The English language learners generally do a little better with visual learning over verbal learning.* Teachers have had to learn to work with co-operative learning and to adjust to having translations occur in their classrooms.

Teachers have learned through instruction some cultural information, mostly through the short introductory class that Elizabeth Stringer teaches periodically, although no one volunteered exactly what they had learned. Some have learned a few Spanish words and phrases through similar classes offered at the schools. They have learned how to conduct group work through instructional intervention. They have heard that it generally takes five years for a child to develop proficiency in a second language.

Teachers also learn through reflection, when they have the time and/or some guidance to reflect. I think it is reasonable to assume these teachers might not have made the following comments were it not for the interview:

*Female teacher: Sometimes the language barrier is used as an excuse, I don't understand what you are telling me, and they do, but I guess that is human.*

*Interviewer: Do you think sometimes there is more than language? I mean we live in a region where we have own sayings, there[are] a lot of colloquialisms, there[are] a lot of things even in the curriculum itself, and I am sure you know what I am talking about as far as the research-based stuff that shows that in the curriculum it's made for a mainstream American audience, and if you are not in that mainstream, if you are a minority, then there are some barriers to be able to ...[understand]... it's more than just intelligence or reading or something like that. How do you feel in the case of those kids?*

*FP: It is a good question, but I just don't know the answer.*

*FP: I think you are right, but I think it's not just limited to them, I think it's limited to anyone who moves from one area to another that they have their own way of doing things. It would be like putting me in the city.*

*MP: Yeah. Some things they were talking about you wouldn't know.*

*FP: Wouldn't have a clue.*

*MP: My parents are from Mississippi, and there is a population down in the Delta in Mississippi, black population, we run into them down there and it's English, but it's not. It's completely different.*

And the following:

*One told me one time he said you should see what we left back in Mexico.. They had a little gumption. He didn't use the word gumption, I don't know what it was.*

*FP: It would take a lot of gumption to go from your home to somewhere else where you didn't speak the language to get a job.*

*FP: It would.*

*FP: And to move your family.*

*MP: So, really what we got around here, the Spanish we got are classy people.*

*FP: I think they know a lot about it for sure...where they were going, not knowing what they were going to find, but yet they were willing to try. Makes you think of the Israelites.*

As teachers reflected on the interview question, it is clear that they were searching for parallels from their own knowledge to the experience of their immigrant students. The first teacher notes that any move, from one area to another can create problems in communication and relating. A

personal example is offered, “It would be like putting me into the city.” Respect is implied for those who made the journey the immigrants have made by the term “gumption,” with which all concurred. Finally, the extension of parallels and meaning making by making the connection with the Biblical epic of the journeys of the Israelites is fascinating.

The learning experience of the teachers who speak Spanish is elevated to another level, especially that of Elizabeth Stringer. They learn by interacting with the children and the parents and in the native language as well as in L2. Jealynn Coleman has learned much about the lives of the children back in their home countries and the culture from which they proceed. They continue to add to their fluency and knowledge of the Spanish language as spoken by their students and the families of students. She and Elizabeth have learned that not all aspects of the Hispanic culture as exemplified by the local community are attractive. While Jealynn Coleman’s learning has apparently taken place largely within the schools, Elizabeth Stringer’s learning is both within and without the schools, but is probably weighted towards her interactions outside schools.

Elizabeth’s learning centers have extended into some of the saddest trailer parks in Southwest Virginia, local churches, social services, and even into Mexico. She has seen the differences in cultures among the people from different countries. I suspect she is realizing more and more that often those differences are not so much country based but are class-based. Her data field are primarily the uneducated, and originally at least, mostly undocumented from Mexico, Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador, who have more in common than not. Then there are a very few with college degrees from their home countries, who happen to be from the Dominican Republic and Colombia. Pedagogically, she conducts a somewhat dual language classroom with her English language learners, because the students are comfortable with it and it works, while retaining an open and questioning mind about the value of bilingual education as far as the students are concerned. She has learned about how documents may be spurious from countries in Latin America, and how shockingly misogynistic some young male students can be. She has been horrified to discover domestic abuse of all kinds, along with drug-addiction, drug peddling, gang-related activity, violence, cheating, and abandonment.

Stringer has had her heart broken over students who work hard to learn and gradually seem to get a vision to finish high school, who suddenly and without notice quit school, and in some cases simply disappear without leaving a trace. She has experienced the love of la Raza

(the Hispanic people), their appreciation for her tireless efforts, and also has been hurt by deception. She even had a scary episode where she was being stalked by a Hispanic male who declared his bizarre romantic intentions openly, and eventually had to seek legal protection. She has also been disappointed by the xenophobia of a few of her fellow Galax neighbors. Recently, she told me she had resigned herself “to just love them” [the Hispanics] and not to try to solve all their problems, or understand everything they do. As a person who has been working with and studying the people of Mexico since 1973, I can say she is on a solid ground.

Principal Davidson has learned on bus duty that the children are eager to teach him about their culture, their families, and appreciate every word he learns in Spanish. He has learned just how much the students appreciate teachers who try to learn Spanish. He has learned that parents generally do not approach the administration and are very trusting of the same. He also has learned that Hispanics value work over education. He has learned to encourage new techniques in teaching such as labeling all materials and the value of cooperative group work. He believes that immersion methods starting in Pre-K are the best way for children to learn English, and does not want a bilingual school. He has learned that it is possible to have fluent readers who can’t understand what they are reading. He has recently discovered that some of his assumptions about the local Hispanic population were false, when 83 children stayed out of school during the boycott on May 1, 2006.

#### *Concluding Thoughts to Part One*

Galax schools have experienced a significant demographic change over a period of a decade with the influx of Hispanic immigrant students, or children of Hispanic immigrants. The schools have made many adaptations in order to accommodate these new students in an evolving series of stages, beginning with the recruitment of local Spanish-speaking residents for volunteer work, and finally to hiring ESL teachers and offering short Spanish language and Hispanic cultural awareness courses to personnel. Teachers have had to improvise strategies for instruction, accommodate the presence of bilingual aides, as well as devise assessment strategies on their own. They have individually devised diverse means of adapting to these new classroom environments, and express varied feelings of satisfaction/discontentment with the changes that have occurred. Spanish-speaking teachers perceive cultural issues as a cause of tension while monolingual teachers and administrators tend to focus on language factors as “barriers” and “problems” in the instructional process. Language—specifically, non-native English

proficiency—may be used as a basis for retaining students who otherwise have learned the content objectives. Some educators may be struggling with having appropriate dispositions for working with Spanish-speaking immigrant students. Teachers and administrators are “learning” mixed and contradictory signals from their interaction and observation of Hispanic students. All express the need for more preparation for administering to the instructional needs of immigrant students.

## CHAPTER SIX—THE IMPACT OF IMMIGRATION IN THE SCHOOLS PART TWO

This chapter continues the examination of the schools from the students' perspectives, including native Galax students and Hispanic immigrants. The research questions continue to guide the narrative and discussion in this chapter. Following the students' responses, I continue with a discussion of some of the factors that impact Hispanic immigrant students through their schooling experience and that may lead to dropout. Finally, using the lens of critical pedagogy and socio-cultural developmental theory, I analyze the Galax schools and offer some suggestions for improving the educational experience for immigrant students.

### *The Students Turn*

Among the 17 students I interviewed in schools, there were several common themes across the groups, while other themes surfaced according to Hispanic immigrant/emigrant (nine Hispanics) or non-immigrant (eight) status. Language, "racism," concerns over violence, and soccer were the common denominators across all groups, with the exception of the middle school native Galax focus group\*<sup>5</sup>. I include a short section relating to the problems of speaking and being understood in classrooms, which often manifests itself in silence. Then I turn to a discussion of issues of identity, language, nationalism, difference, marginalization and dropout.

Language as barrier, language as the major difference between Hispanics and non-Hispanics, language as the cause for communication breakdown, language as the source of difficulty in the classroom, language as a cause of segregation outside the classroom, accents as a cause of difficulty in communication and motive for scorn are some of the underlying themes that students revealed. For the immigrant students, language is the most obvious of all factors making an impact upon their lives as a result of immigration. The majority of them live in two language worlds—in one world, the home and church where the native language continues to be dominant, and everywhere else where English is the medium. As far as learning about each other, language also is probably the area that most learning is taking place at school and on the playground within both groups of students, although informal learning through peer interaction is likely higher than through formal classroom instruction. The majority of the non-immigrant

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<sup>5</sup> I am unsure what the factors were that produced such a meager result in the interview with the middle school focus group of native Galax students. Whether they came into the interview with something distracting their attention or occupying their minds, peer group pressures, or more likely my lack of recent practice with engaging this age group contributed to the sterility of our interaction. The results, lamentably, are that not enough information was forthcoming.



students is not taking Spanish as a class, but is learning words and phrases as they interact with Hispanic peers. I was impressed with the evidence of eagerness to learn Spanish in all three schools, and believe that the schools are missing an opportunity to address that hunger by responding slowly or being limited to traditional foreign language classroom instruction. Corina Hughes indicated that over 300 students signed up for Spanish classes—numbers the school could not accommodate, as she is the sole Spanish teacher in high school. With some skilled and enlightened leadership in this area, the schools and the town could become a model of bilingualism in relatively a brief span of time.

Students are quick to use the term “racism” when they perceive any injustice or unfairness related to individuals who are members of minorities. Some of the non-immigrant students acknowledge a problem, but virtually all of the Hispanic students express emotion related to being treated differently or unfairly and can give abundant examples of each. They do this sometimes with humor and sometimes expressing hurt, confusion, and sometimes with anger. When the focus groups talk, I have the feeling that the experience of talking about these issues together is cathartic, as well as a means of making meaning from their experience.

As has often been said, poor Mexicans didn’t first have the experience of being marginalized in the United States. For many of the poor and indigenous peoples, centuries of oppression and marginalization within the boundaries of the Republic of Mexico preceded the current wave of migration to their northern neighbor. Classism is rampant in Latin America, and certainly the poor learn where they are not likely to receive a warm welcome at an early age. Yet, the feelings they express about feeling discriminated against in Southwest Virginia seem more to do with their identity as Hispanics as an ethnicity, rather than their socioeconomic status of being poor, and this feeling is different than what they or their parents experience in Mexico and Central America. There the world is made up of the rich and the poor, and although the dark skinned overwhelmingly outnumber the lighter skinned in the latter category, color is certainly not the absolute definition of a person’s status, and the lighter skinned are the minority, numerically.

Even those students who have excelled in Galax schools and who speak highly of the helpful teachers, those who spoke no English upon arriving and have graduated with honors from high school and are college bound with scholarships, say volumes by their silence and short responses loaded with feelings of experiencing some form of discrimination. *“They are never*

*going to see us exactly [equal] like them, but I think they are getting better at accepting us more,”* says one. Another star student who only expresses appreciation for helpful teachers along the way wants to study accounting and government, *“because I like learning about the laws, things to protect yourself.”* When pressed, the students acknowledge that the people expressing explicit racist behavior are a minority in the schools. That is not to say that it does not exist. Most of the problems they discussed have to do with experiences outside of the schools. Within the schools, I believe that at least some of the problems that some Hispanic students categorize as racism are more a lack of cultural understanding among the “perpetrators” than the mean and prejudiced spirit associated with racism. Lack of knowledge of the other on the part of students, teachers and administrators can play into the feelings of marginalization so common among immigrants and feel like racism or discrimination to students living the immigrant experience. Having said that, as the boycott of May 1 showed, the inclusive “our [Hispanic] students” can quickly become a “they” in normal conversation, and well-intentioned people fall back into a “we-they” binary, with resulting discriminatory overtones.

Related to concerns over racism is the concern over violence. While in most cases, all participants who raised the issue of violence spoke in the past tense, there is an indication that there is latent violence present in the schools and the community. The violent acts that occurred in the past seem to have been perpetrated by a few African Americans against some Hispanic males. In one incident described, one of the African American girls participated in luring a Hispanic male out into a hall where two African American males inflicted sufficient damage to require hospital treatment. The males in the high school focus group of native students, which included an African American male, felt that most of the problems were adolescent machismo, and that once the Hispanic males demonstrated their manhood, that a reasonable and acceptable peace was established. Some of the jesting that occurs between these two groups is laced with racial overtones as the following indicates: “we will say comments to each other, oh here comes deportation and they will say something like, oh here comes slave ship or something.” It is interesting how these groups of people, who have traditionally experienced oppression, relate to each other using the very tools of oppression as reminders of where their backgrounds lie. Is it to say, you are no better than me? Some of the Hispanic young people used a slang word that was new to me referring to African Americans. They called them “moyos” and I have no idea what the origin of the word is and when I asked, the students said it just refers to African Americans.

Two of the Hispanic girls intended to do some physical harm to one white girl who was part of a “small group” who criticized the Hispanic girls because of their accents, skin color, calling them wetbacks, saying to them “go back to Mexico so we can get our jobs back,” etc. One of the two Hispanic girls said, “I took care of it,” although she said she did not do what she had intended to, but still got in trouble for it. The girl who said that is a very petite and generally very friendly girl, but whose family life is rife with violence and abuse. One of the Hispanic girls only had been in the Galax schools for eight months at the time of the interview, and made numerous references to the cult of violence and gangs that permeate the schools she had attended in the state of California. She said that students were regularly recruited to join violent street gangs by the age of 14. She was undergoing a cultural adaptation, and expressed surprise that blacks and whites got along in Galax. For both of these girls, to resort to some form of violence to settle issues of racism seemed normal and legitimate. Fortunately, nothing serious happened; both graduated and have moved on.

*King soccer.*

Soccer is mentioned by almost all of the participants as the one place where the Hispanic males excel. I am impressed with the importance of soccer as an arena where identity is reaffirmed and respect is earned and acknowledged. The wall in the gym dedicated to success in sports testifies to the prowess of the Hispanic boys on the field: District champions in 1999, 2000, 2002-2006, and regional champions in 2005. Fans, many of whom know very little about the rules of soccer, attend even away games (see Appendix B ) and cheer on the boys by name, not an insignificant fact since some of those names are more difficult to pronounce for the North American English speaker. Some participants say that by their success on the field, parents, alumni and other students learn the names of the players and greet them in the halls and in public places in ways that were not experienced before.

It is on the sports field that much of the learning takes place between peers of different cultural and linguistic backgrounds and that friendships are forged. Several of the native students spoke of learning Spanish by playing sports with the Hispanics. Two of the coaches are trying to learn Spanish, but the students are doing so in the normal social ways that peers do. Perhaps even more importantly, students from diverse backgrounds become friends and learn to understand one another while competing, and in the teamwork required to play a sport like soccer. It seems to me that the respect, the self-affirmation that occurs for the Hispanic males on the sports field,

combined with the learning, and the eagerness to learn Spanish and culture demonstrated by the native students would indicate that there is even more to explore in the area of sports and its benefits for all involved. A non-traditional approach to learning might include more extensive use of athletic events. Unfortunately, the Hispanic girls in Galax have not overcome their traditional cultural role as non-competitors in athletic events, while in Mexico, there are several international stars in soccer and track and field who are redefining the role and role models for Mexican females. And sadly, it is not apparent that there is another arena where Hispanic girls are able to excel outside of academic achievement.

*Silence.*

Hispanic students say that when they know an answer to a question in the classroom they often remain quiet for fear, based on much experience, that what they say in English will not be understood. Here is just a small sample of quotes related:

Interviewer: *Alguna vez se han sentido tontos [en las clases? (Do you sometimes feel dumb [in class]?)*

Male student: *Yo sí, muchas veces, cuando quiero decir una palabra, no me entienden, quiero decirlo varias veces, pero nada me entienden, entonces no digo nada.*

*(Me? Yes, many times when I want to say a word, they don't understand [me] I want to say it several times, but they don't understand anything, so, I don't say anything.)*

Interviewer: *Y cuando tu hablas, ¿te entienden? (And when you talk, do they understand you?)*

Female student: *No, aveces se me enreda la lengua.” (No, sometimes my tongue gets tangled up.)*

Male student: *Sí, pues, aveces no nos entienden, por que se nos enreda la lengua, no puedo desarrollar bien las palabras. (Yes, sometimes they don't understand us because we become tongue-tied and I can't say the words right.)*

Interviewer: *Cuántas veces les ha pasado que saben la respuesta, pero por estas experiencias no levantan la mano o no contesta? (How many times has it happened that you know the answer, but because of these kinds of experiences, you don't raise your hand or provide an answer?)*

All students: *¡Muchas! (Many!)*

While foreign language teachers are familiar with the “silent period” of learning a new language, in the case of immigrant students, the silence may have many different reasons (Igoa, 1995). As an immigrant herself, Igoa draws from her own experience in relating to immigrant students’ social, linguistic, and educational learning needs. A strategy she finds insightful for teachers seeking to relate to their students and helpful for immigrant students is that of encouraging the creation of art (Igoa). In the ESL classes in Galax middle school, students are encouraged to write about various themes, as well as illustrate their journals with artwork. The themes students choose to write about and the responses they provide often deal with missing family members, their hometowns, and the feeling of being alone. One writes about a brother he hasn’t seen in 13 years and his desire to be able to know and have his father present, who obviously has died.

Hispanic students speak of similar problems with language issues when reading, taking exams, and understanding what is being said. Even exceptional students, who have been in the Galax schools for many years, confess that on exams they often do not know the meaning of many words and have to guess the meaning.

*Segregated lives.*

Despite all the talk of being friends at school and on the athletic fields, outside the schools most students live segregated lives. Hispanics go to their churches or services in Spanish, while few have ever visited in the homes of their cultural counterparts. The students say that when they run into their school friends in a public place they greet one another and talk briefly, but it generally doesn’t go any further. Class has no doubt a huge part to play in that segregation, as well as race and class. There are some cross over relationships as mentioned earlier, and it is now common for blacks to date Hispanics and there are a few white—Hispanic dating couples as well. As people grow older, those walls are apparently breaking down, as almost all of the Hispanic participants have family members who are married to white citizens of the U.S., and know of many examples of mixed marriages.

*Identity, language, nationalism, difference, marginalization, dropout.*

Most all of the Hispanic participants identify themselves as Hispanic, rather than Latino or a particular nationality. Those who identified themselves in another way choose a nationality, such as Mexican. Those who have lived most of their lives in Galax seem to have a dual identity,

choosing Mexican first and then following up with a reference to feeling like Galax is home. Those contrasting experiences, of being of a particular ethnicity and or nationality but also identifying as people from “here” is one of the constant issues immigrant children try and work out, sometimes consciously and often unconsciously. To deny what they are would be to deny one’s parents, whom often have made huge sacrifices to offer their children a chance at a better life, and to deny oneself when looking in the mirror. At the same time, for most of the students, the U.S. has been more good than bad for their families, and is the place where they have grown up, and so they naturally identify with here. Even those like Vanessa and Martin, who speak English with regional southern accents, know they are “different” from the majority and recognize difference and different treatment in some instances.

Being different, feeling marginalized and the choice to drop out are probably very closely related. Without exception, all of the Hispanic students feel marginalized, with some feeling more while others less. Even those who profess to have friends from all social groups in school, betray feelings of feeling different. It was interesting to me that the Hispanic seniors I interviewed chose to do the interviews in English, interspersed with short phrases in Spanish, while the middle schoolers strongly preferred to participate in Spanish. Their choice of language indicates feelings and also issues of identity. The high schoolers were more articulate about their feelings of marginalization and much more astute politically than the middle schoolers, and mostly identified themselves as Hispanics. However, the overall feeling I received in the focus group with the middle schoolers was of people much more keen about being different and very much affected by their being different both in the schools and in the community. Most of them were still in ESL classrooms, while the seniors were more proficient in English, having been in U.S. schools for a longer period of time. The middle schoolers each said they were ‘Mexicans’ and most all said they planned on returning to Mexico in the future. The seniors were, to one degree or another, militantly accepting their identity and destiny as Hispanic minorities in the U.S., with a bittersweet flavor of having surmounted many obstacles to obtain a high school diploma. The seniors, by definition, had overcome, while the greatest temptations to dropout are still ahead for the middle schoolers.

The assimilationist approach the Galax schools have taken concerning language may play a role in the crisis of identity for students. Getting English first, while learning becomes secondary, except when it comes to the required standardized tests, can subtly but seriously

erode the immigrant's sense of self-worth. The erosion of a healthy self-image, which must proceed from home life, is also undermined by the prevalent belief that native language creates interference for learning English, and is reinforced by teachers who discourage students and parents from speaking Spanish at school and at home. When children are rewarded in overt and covert means for not speaking their native language and for becoming skilled in English, the short-term gains may be setting some children up for future failure. Whether it is the smiles that accompany a copper-colored child's developing reading skills with a southern accent, or the absence of that strained look teachers often have when a student's pronunciation or syntax is non-standard, the rewards are present for language gain and language loss.

The realization of native or "home language" erosion that often accompanies English gains through schooling can be a slow fuse for a future crisis during the high school years. My own grandson's first language is Spanish and he used to always choose to speak to me in Spanish, but as I allow him to take the lead in the language of our communication, I notice that each year he has moved more to English dominance. The change is such that now, as a third grader, he often gets a puzzled look on his face when his stepmother, a Peruvian, speaks to him. He often struggles to produce the language necessary for normal interaction, typically responds in English to an interchange that began in Spanish, and it is unclear if he reluctantly speaks in Spanish due to language erosion or whether he is simply bothered by the extra effort, or if there is an identity factor at play. His color and striking features help him appear that coveted "American" tanned look, and with his native sounding English accent will help him blend harmoniously into mainstream U.S. life. However, for the typically darker complexioned Hispanic children, the societal reminders, ever present in schooling, despite language and grade gains, of who they are, can create serious conflicts that may influence involvement in other marginalized identities, such as gangs, as well as dropout.

The constant reminders of being different in school may be heightened when returning home or in the neighborhood where the Hispanic student faces another struggle of identity with his/her eroding native language skills. Children may feel rejection towards the home language and culture, and even disdain for a cultural heritage that is either suppressed or sensationalized in schools and mainstream, as a root cause of the feelings of difference they are subjected to. They may feel discouragement over the huge struggle that faces them in order to be successful by mainstream standards, and which are constantly being reinforced in their conscious and

unconscious learning environments. Students may be embarrassed to speak Spanish in public or even to be identified with their often poor and unschooled parents due to their continual struggle to eliminate the uncomfortable feeling of difference in a white dominant world. Schooling can be elevating and yet be two edged, as it illuminates difference but so amply rewards sameness.

Content in schooling can also reinforce marginalization for Hispanic immigrants. While some newer textbooks include short inserts on Hispanic or Mexican culture like the Cinco de Mayo celebration, artist and feminist Frida Kahlo, or the Aztec and Mayan civilizations, the content often seems like promotions for tourism rather than serious engagement in larger themes represented by these iconic issues of history. They are also constantly obliterated by the nationalistic content in social studies, for example, required for passing the SOLs. Consider the effort to create nationalistic pride through selective information on Texas' wars of "freedom," which generally focuses on despotic, inhumane and absent leadership from Mexico City, the hordes (hear Mongols) of "highly trained professional" Mexican soldiers (Mexico is still waiting for an army of that caliber) who descended on a "band" (hear brave pioneers) of "freedom fighters" that included Davy Crockett (untouchable, freedom martyr) and Jim Bowie (colorful). Another favorite is the mythological incident portrayed as a humorous and justifying moment (Ha, ha, bad guys lose) where Mexican President and General Santa Ana was captured by Sam Houston (great American) while relieving himself, and promptly signed away the southwest to save his neck (Justice is served, the good guys won—Jesus, what a great country this is. God is on our side. And by extension: What about that, Taliban? Just wait, Osama. Look out Iran.). These messages from school are reinforced overtly and subliminally in society continually, such as in the phrase from the Marine hymn, "from the halls of Montezuma to the shores of Tripoli, we will fight our nation's battles, on land, in air and sea." The same armed forces are able to follow up on schooling by targeting the immigrant community and other marginalized sectors of society for recruitment! (Be American, be a marine! Can't go to college because of being undocumented? You can go to Iraq and be a hero. You might be awarded citizenship posthumously.)<sup>6</sup>

Imagine the message Mexican immigrant children or children of Mexican immigrants are subjected to through these efforts at socializing and homogenizing students in mandatory content

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<sup>6</sup> Shortly after the invasion of Iraq in 2003, rumors spread in Mexico that the Bush administration would grant citizenship to Mexicans who became soldiers and would fight in the conflict. The resulting tumult was such that a series of public statements denying the rumors were necessary to staunch the flow of candidates.



areas. Opportunities are missed to allow students to deal with issues from this period that are vitally related to current events, such as the long struggle for representative democratic government in this country and our immediate neighbors to the south, the politics of empire, etc. I was amused one day while observing a class of immigrant students being socialized as they prepared for the SOLs to the proper response on key issues of U.S. history. As the text dealt with issues relating to the U.S. Southwest and the number of states that belong to the Southwest, one middle school girl made a low voiced critical observation, which the teacher did not hear: “porque se lo robaron” (yes, because they stole it [from Mexico]). Unfortunately, immigrant children are too often not being given the tools in schools to think critically concerning issues that are vital to them, and to developing a healthy identity.

Sometimes all it takes is something very small and insignificant for people to notice, or to remind the immigrant that they are different. Even those who speak with perfect southern accents occasionally betray their roots through fossilized syntax to the careful observer, if not to the speaker themselves. Sometimes it’s a look in the mirror, like the little girl in elementary school who wants to dye her hair blond and get blue contacts “so people will like me.” Popular culture has become more and more international and yet it is the popular cultural areas that are those areas of emptiness for many immigrants; there is little or no prior knowledge of a theme or subject, and that leaves them out of the loop in a classroom or a conversation or the not so subtle comedian’s punch line. The feeling of being different or left out can be very painful as well as frustrating.

Fortunately, the immigration status is secure for many of the students in Galax as more and more are born here. However, the outstanding state soccer player last year and likely a repeater this year, is undocumented, and faces the possibility that he will not be able to attend college as a result, even though he has many advocates working on his behalf. Non-stars and struggling students may have no one to advocate for them, even though they may well be the students who are learning the most. For many of the students, their parents are undocumented and the current debate on immigration policy is another source of anxiety. The recent House bill that would make the undocumented felons can be a huge message to Hispanic immigrant students. I wonder in how many homes a contingency plan is discussed, e.g., should one or both parents face deportation, what would they do with the children? My guess is that very few would articulate a similar plan, since the ‘what if?’ so common in the thinking of western civilization is

largely absent among the discourse of many Mexicans. They would choose a route of “pidiendole a Dios” (asking God) to watch over them, often by more than one manifestation (such as simple prayer, but also special offerings or promises to saints or virgins), and also be willing to stoically accept whatever happens as “la voluntad de Dios” (the will of God), modifying behavior to fit the circumstances in order to survive. Yet, even with the recourse of faith, the fear of deportation hangs over the minds and hearts of many Hispanic immigrants, and is often seen as the number one fear of immigrant students. Even for those whose entire families are perfectly legal, they are aware that the public looks at them with a questioning eye, and on the other hand, they are also expected to identify with the concerns of “La Raza.” Their white or Black classmates do not have to be concerned with these issues, accentuating the feelings of otherness and marginalization for the Hispanic immigrant.

Perhaps it is just the feeling that even little children get when they know that people don’t like them because of the way they look or talk. Perhaps it is those few but often cruelly effective racist remarks and attitudes that wear down a person’s enthusiasm over time that lead to that feeling of marginalization. Perhaps it is the need for increased family income or the lure of personal income at non-skilled jobs that appear at the time when students are most vulnerable to dropout. Some students say those who drop out are tired of school, or say they don’t like their teachers or the work required. According to some of the participants, the discouragement that plagues Hispanic students who do not have legal residency and who know that they will be unable to go on to college is a big factor in the decision to dropout. At least one high achiever said that some students don’t put enough effort in school and when they find they are failing a class, decide to dropout. Serious family problems are a cause of discouragement, sometimes of displacement, and are the root motive to dropout for some. Some drop out because their friends have done so, and the fact that they are no longer in school creates a void in school life. Others drop out just because they say they don’t like school, although in at least one case, the girl was dependent on another Hispanic friend to help her understand her classes; she was the object of racial comments, and some students made fun of her because of her size.

Perhaps there are a myriad of combinations of factors that contribute to the temptation to dropout. The fact is that the dropout rate is horrific for Mexican immigrant children in U.S. schools, and dropout among even good students continues to be a concern in Galax as well, including administrators, teachers, and other students. Hispanic students who stay in school try to

encourage their peers who are contemplating the decision to dropout to stay in school and finish their high school degree, but often without success. Many of the participants have siblings as well as friends who have dropped out. Without intending to or being aware, and believing they are preparing students for success through assimilationist policies and practice, schools can actually be setting immigrant children up to have serious identity crises, become estranged from their families, and dropout. The need for identity may lead some to become involved with subcultures such as gangs and develop hostility into illegal violence, or develop hostility into legal violence, like becoming a soldier.

Either path offers acceptance into a community that feels accessible to a young Hispanic. Perhaps the decision is which of those communities offers the more valued rewards, and which community's acceptance is more important. I believe schools have a tremendous role to play in that choice. Fortunately, there are many and varied options to Hispanic immigrants besides the two juxtaposed here, and even for high school dropouts. Statistically, dropouts do not live lives that the mainstream would define as a high quality of life, and schools, rightfully so, are considered suspect when they fail to keep students involved until they graduate successfully. Even those who graduate "by the skin of their teeth" have more and better options than dropouts. The facts continue to favor sub par performance and dropout over graduation for Mexican immigrant children and so we must assume there is much for schools to learn in order to eliminate or minimize this phenomenon.

The highly successful students like Martin and Vanessa, seem to have developed a shell that serves to insulate them from the forces that have brought down many other less successful students. The ten years that they have been in the caring, if not always competent (for English language learners), schools of Galax is certainly a factor in their success, as are the wonderful supporting families that are their underpinning. They have learned to appreciate and express appreciation for the assistance and kindness of teachers and administrators, while focusing on self-development and accepting the unequal status they have experienced as Hispanic, former English language learners in Galax schools. They have learned to compete successfully in the classroom with non-immigrant counterparts. Perhaps just as importantly, they have learned that they can compete with native students even when the playing field is uneven. Working long hours outside of school and observing the struggle of their parents to survive has strengthened

their resolve and served to focus their efforts to climb the socioeconomic ranks through education.

Their amazing southern accents testify to the attention they have placed over many years to sounding “correct” to the ear of the U.S. establishment as defined by Galax schools. The future will tell just how much of themselves as Hispanics and children of immigrants they will yield in order to become successful in their careers. Attorney General Alberto Gonzales does not sound like a child of Mexican immigrant parents, neither in his accent and choice of words, nor in his language as discourse. In fact, I am sure I am not the only observer who wonders how he reconciles some of his views towards today’s Hispanic immigrants with the facts of his family background. Held up as a model of the assimilationist American success story and a confirmation of the “bootstraps” belief, there is also a bit of irony hanging around the man. Although not possessing the pathos of Richard Rodriguez, I wonder if his parents and family members sometimes wince as I do at statements he makes and beliefs he espouses, even as they are rightfully proud of his success.

*Critical ethnography and a Vygotskian pedagogy of hope.*

In this section, I briefly review key elements of the learning theories of Friere (2002) and Vygotsky (1986, 2002) as they relate to the schools in Galax. I borrow from Trueba (1999), who provides an example of a model teacher who illustrates a Vygotskian pedagogy of hope. Finally, I summarize with some suggestions for continual improvement of educational experiences for immigrants based on the present conditions in the Galax schools.

Ethnographer Enrique (Henry) Trueba is a longtime student of and advocate for Mexican immigrant children in U.S. schools. His first career was as a Catholic priest and he served for years amongst some of southern Mexico’s indigenous peoples, including in the beleaguered state of Chiapas. Later, researchers from Stanford encouraged him to pursue a career as a researcher in that institution. He has been involved in research among Hispanic immigrant children for a number of years, with numerous publications and wide acceptance. He has been an administrator for various high profile universities in the U.S., including the University of Illinois (Champaign-Urbana), University of Wisconsin (Madison), University of California (Davis), and is currently administrator at the University of Texas (Houston) (Trueba, 1999).

Combining the elements of Paulo Freire’s critical pedagogy and a pedagogy of hope with Vygotsky’s sociocultural theories of learning, Trueba insists that a critical ethnographer be

identified through praxis with the advocacy needs that Mexican immigrant children have. Freire's concept of traditional learning included "banking," where the student supposedly arrives with a *tabula rasa*, an empty head with little or no prior knowledge that is relevant, to learn what the teacher, as authoritarian, possessed. The process of teaching involved the teacher passing on knowledge to fill up the empty heads in the classroom. In contrast, for Freire, the teacher becomes a facilitator arranging a learning experience for active learners, allowing the students to discover through guided activities involving several defined stages. Learning also involves becoming literate, that is that the learner must learn the word, learn of the written word, but also must learn to read the world, that is to analyze the world critically and discern the forces that work in society, which include perceiving how oppression works with both the oppressor and the oppressed. Learners must also be able to define their worlds, much as the supposed first man named all the elements in his environment (Freire, 2002). In fact, much of Freireian thought parallels Christian Catholic theology, and those elements are very present in the school of theology known as liberation theology, which had such an impact in Latin America in the 1960s-1990s, although strongly opposed by Pope John Paul the Second (Winn, 1999).

Praxis, for Freire develops from the biblical principle of works, as in "faith without works is dead" (James 1:17). The process of liberation involves learning to read text, learning to read forces, speaking the word of liberation in the face of the oppressor and acting in a manner that is consistent with learning and that results in liberation from oppressive forces, and ultimately the freedom to define one's new parameters. The context of Freirian thought was the misery that typified the oppressed poor of Latin America. Obviously, the oppressors in Latin America (those in positions of power, both politically, militarily, and economically) were not keen on the worker class becoming so enlightened and much less their becoming empowered to stand up to those institutions and individuals who represented systems of oppression (Chomsky, 2002; Loewen, 1995).

Much of the bloodshed in Latin America, from the southern cone in Chile, Argentina, and Uruguay in the 1970s and 1980s and the Central American wars of the 1970s-1990s was related to the response from the powerful to the struggle of the worker classes to become empowered (Montaner, 2002; Rosenberg, 1991). One of the primary factors that so many Central American refugees came to this country and others was to escape the widespread assassination of anyone who even appeared to have connections with any sort of people's movement, which were

typically labeled as “communist” in this country. While guerrilla warfare was (and is) very real (Wickam-Crowley, 1992), too often people movements were labeled as insurrectionist by oppressive regimes, and violently resisted by those regimes in Latin America (Ekaizer, 2003; Hitchens, 2001). The U.S. government supported conservative governments, including military dictatorships by heavy funding and military support to fight what it determined to be communist rebels (Winn, 1999). Freire, however, taught that change must be dialogic and pedagogical, and warned of the dangers for the oppressed to becoming like the oppressors in the process of becoming liberated (Freire, 2002).

Rather than an empty head, for Freire, the learner arrives with lots of lived experience and prior knowledge that he/she simply needs assistance (Vygotsky, 1986) in relating to new knowledge. This cultural capital of the poor may be of little value to the reigning elite, but becomes essential when applied to learning for Mexican and Hispanic immigrant children in U.S. schools. Trueba observes the richness of generations of acquired cultural capital with which the Hispanic immigrant arrives to U.S. schools. The child is rich in his/her native language, values, some knowledge of his/her family and national history, and rich in cultural traditions that may include religious and other systems of belief, along with passed on folk wisdom.

The immigrant child probably has a lived experience that includes at least one adventurous journey north to cross over into the United States, more than likely at night, where “the bad guys” are the U.S. Border Patrol as well as unscrupulous human smugglers, Mexican police and authorities, and gangs along the border. They have lived or observed experience, which includes learning how the economy works from the bottom up. They have learned about modifying certain behavior, including diet and otherwise in order to survive and to blend in. They have experienced fear and hope in ways that their U.S. classmates may have only experienced vicariously in the movies, or in a theme park. They have experienced amazing victories in their young lives by simply surviving all the obstacles, including possible violence en route, and arriving in Virginia. In that sense, they have experienced a triumph in life far beyond that of so many of their classmates and even teachers. Harvard researcher Carola Suárez-Orozco says that the act of illegal immigration in itself is a violent act for children (Suárez-Orozco, 2000).

I am reminded of the 19 year old El Salvadoran boy that the Border Patrol allowed me to interview while in custody on the Texas border. He described his four-month journey from San

Salvador that included hopping a train in southern Mexico and watching another immigrant traveler be pushed from his handhold and be crushed under the wheels, and finding work [and presumably some helpful people] along the way in various cities in Mexico. He told me that he had just celebrated his birthday, and suddenly let out a shout of joy, exclaiming, “¡*No puedo creer que ya llegué!*” (I can’t believe that I’ve made it!) Triumph can be measured in many ways in the human experience. Being caught by the Border Patrol and facing deportation hearings in the U.S. is defined by this young boy as having made it, as a personal triumph, and who can argue with him?

In short, these children arrive to U.S. schools with extraordinary rich human lived experience and knowledge as cultural capital. An assimilationist approach to education ignores and denies most of that richness, and essentially says and practices towards the immigrant child the message that: “very little of what you are or what you know has value here. You can begin to learn what is of value here by learning a new language. Don’t let the old one interfere with learning English.” Freire and Trueba and many other educators reject this approach to teaching. Teachers and administrators who have little knowledge of the rich cultural capital that immigrant children embody and who are constrained by a traditional Virginia Department of Education perspective of teaching, which includes the strong emphasis on the SOLs, inevitably fall short of being the enlightened educators that can work with the prior knowledge and skills these students arrive with while assisting in the acquisition of new knowledge and skills.

Lev Vygotsky developed his theories of human learning by studying both animals and children in the new Soviet Union of the 1920s. The atmosphere for researchers in those early years of the Soviet Union was one of extraordinary optimism, as they felt they were privileged with beginning again to study and understand the human condition and able to push aside all previously accepted dogma regarding the same. Vygotsky claimed that language and learning were intertwined and that learning occurred when children as novices were in social settings and interacted with adults as experts and with other peers in play, including language play, and in the accomplishing of tasks. According to Vygotsky, novices are able to accomplish certain tasks (called the Zone of [actual] Development) without assistance, but with expert assistance, which he termed “scaffolding,” were able to accomplish much more. Novices come with prior knowledge and not as empty heads, and the prior knowledge is relative to the new task. As the novice progressed in ability, the potential area of accomplishment by the novice, which

Vygotsky termed the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) increased, with a decreasing need for assistance on the part of the expert (Vygotsky, 1986).

Learning then, is a constructive exercise and knowledge is co-constructed as novices interact with experts and peers. The skill of the expert exists in the knowledge of the principles that the task requires and knowledge of the subject matter to apply the principles, plus the skill to provide the appropriate scaffolding along the continuum of the child's learning. Thus, the "teacher" becomes the expert facilitator and engages the student "novice" in the task by referring to prior learned knowledge and skills, by providing new knowledge and assisting students to relate it to prior learned knowledge, and by gradually removing assistance in order for the student to accomplish more and more without assistance.

*Mr. Villegas.*

As an example of a teacher who embodies the principles of Freire and Vygotsky, Trueba (1999) uses a fourth grade teacher named Mr. Villegas in a town he calls Migrant Town in California (Trueba, p.137). Trueba describes Mr. Villegas as a tall, very brown man, who speaks English and Spanish perfectly and the school is 98% Mexican with half the student population being born in Mexico and the other half being children of Mexican immigrants. He opens the class with loud ranchero music [music ubiquitous in the children's environment outside school] to get the children to sing for a few minutes; "then he makes them beg to start with math." When he addresses the children he uses the children's nicknames in Spanish, such as Pulga (flea), Mariposa (butterfly) and employs phrases that the children are familiar with such as "Orale, a darle" (All right, let's do it!), and reads them poems that he has written that encourage hard work, family values, and anti-drug behaviors. He provides periodic breaks in the class to allow the children to participate in fun but meaningful activities that instill pride in being Mexican or of Mexican descent, of having a dark complexion. A popular teacher, parents pressure the principal to allow their children admittance to his class.

An excerpt from the class reveals a dual language approach to teaching where the children's first language is typically used to motivate and to give directives while most of the language of instruction is English. He gives the students difficult problems but allows them to work as a whole class, as individuals with the whole class providing scaffolding, and small group work, often allowing the students to work step by step through the equations in a manner that reveals the thought process without humiliating the child, and with constant and pending support



by the teacher and competent peers. The interaction between Villegas and the children is more like that between nieces and nephews and a very close uncle. Interchanges between the teacher and students include messages that indicate the teacher's familiarity with the children's parents and that somehow involve the parents in the learning experience at school. A sick child is sent to the infirmary with care but accompanied by a humorous exhortation just like would be heard in the children's home. All of this happens with the class in control of the teacher at all times. Language is a tool of communication in Villegas' classroom, which borders on intimacy, exactly like the environment in which healthy Mexican families interact and in which children are most at ease. Learning is the focus and learning is occurring, in ways that are astonishing with this group of children [my math skills were not up to doing the equation the fourth grade children performed with ease] (Trueba, 1999, pp. 137-140).

With Mr. Villegas, Mexican children or children of Mexican descent have a role model that looks like "them"—that is to say looks like people in their families and communities, sounds like them, makes them feel like they are at home, understands the relationships expected between parents and child, children and teachers, parents and teachers, and the expectations of learning of the culture from which they proceed. He is able to engage students in individual and corporate learning and creates an environment of production (Zone of Performance) and scaffolding that measures student progress and foments their desire to explore the unexplored areas of learning and accomplishing tasks (ZPD). He brings accountability to each student by the intimate relationships he establishes with the children's parents. Perhaps, among the most important traits Villegas brings to the classroom is that he makes the children feel loved, accepted, and raises expectations for their learning and performance that cause the children to work hard to please him and provides the affective factor of pride in achievement that they respond to positively. As far as subject matter knowledge, Mr. Villegas is obviously more than competent to teach the subjects required in the fourth grade. He is also an advocate for the children, building personal and community pride and preparing the students holistically for the struggle of life that immigrant children in the U.S. face.

### Concluding Thoughts and Recommendations

Applying the two pedagogical schools of thought to the educational experience for Hispanic immigrant students in a town in Appalachia implies first of all experts who are knowledgeable about the culture and language of the immigrant students, and who are able to use

the known cultural and linguistic tools of the students to engage the students in ever increasingly diverse and complex tasks across the schooling experience, but especially in the first years in school. From a Vygotskian perspective, in the absence “experts” in the home language and culture of Hispanic students, students have found a way to scaffold each other, in a makeshift dual-language approach to learning, where “*more qualified peers*” take on the roles of experts. Unfortunately, some teachers resist the students’ use of Spanish in the learning process, which is essential to the development of knowledge in the subject matter.

If we use the theoretical tools of Freire and Vygotsky as a lens to examine practice at the Galax schools, we discover first of all that they are severely understaffed with teachers that are generally poorly equipped to provide an adequate education for this targeted group of students. Two ESL teachers for three schools is inadequate when roughly 20% of the early grades have children who are English language learners and who speak Spanish at home, even when considering the teacher aides. More teachers might become reasonably fluent in Spanish and become reasonably knowledgeable about Mexican and Central American culture. They urgently need more Elizabeth Stringers, whose classroom most closely mirrors that of Mr. Villegas, and who is an example of the praxis of a pedagogy of hope; they also would benefit the students by having some qualified teachers who are representatives of Hispanic society and language, and not just aides.

When the Galax schools are viewed in the lens of Freireian and Vygotskian Pedagogy, we see well meaning, caring teachers who are likely unaware of their hegemonic practices in the classroom towards immigrant students. Teachers who see cooperative learning as “cooperative cheating” and active learning noise levels as something they “tolerate” would benefit from new learning experiences themselves. Teachers and administrators would benefit from personal experience with otherness that may influence their words, gestures, facial expressions and choice of language when working with Hispanic immigrants. Teachers and administrators would be wise to seek out sources that would assist them in becoming more knowledgeable concerning the language and culture of the Hispanic students, but also where they may learn new pedagogical tools that have been proven to be effective for these students. Teachers and administrators need to be able to move from their confessed amazement at the trust Hispanic parents have towards them and towards the school to where they have a workable knowledge of what the act of “*entregando al hijo*” (turning over my son) or of “*le encomiendo a mi hija*” (I trust my

daughter into your hands) means for a Hispanic parent. Teachers and administrators need to learn how to involve the children's schema, the ethos from which they proceed, as well as families in the educational experience in the schools.

I believe we need to critically appraise teacher preparation, administrative preparation, textbooks, standardized testing influences in the learning process, teacher and administration dispositions, assumptions of language and instruction, teacher and student interactions, and peer interactions. We might critically address the phenomenon of soccer, find out what we can learn from the success of the immigrants and the melting pot and learning environment the soccer field might become, and seek ways to expand available avenues for immigrant success outside of traditional schooling methods. We can develop methods to engage Hispanic males through academic channels and promote positive role models for them in the academic aspect of schools. We need to discover how to engage Hispanic females in parallel means where they can be successful, engage non-immigrants, and flourish. We can offer to satisfy a growing desire to learn Spanish language and Hispanic culture among native students beyond simply dumping them into traditional Spanish classes. Hiring more qualified teachers in each of the three schools could satisfy the demand for more Spanish classes.

More focused research needs to occur in the area of Mexican dropout rates. The relatively low numbers of dropouts reported in Virginia are misleading. It is widely known that Hispanics show up as "transfers" rather than dropouts, since students say they are leaving or are returning to Mexico, but do not. Little is known about the next steps in these former students' lives. Somewhere between the assimilationist approach to teaching the Hispanic English language learners in Pre-K and the final high school years, there must be factors within the schools that foment the decision to drop out rather than stay in school for these students. Acceptable SOL scores for a majority of students may be a deceptive indicator of success, when other hidden factors are likely working against immigrant students staying in school until they graduate. Administrators would benefit their school populations by having a fresh and informed look at the way they interact with the Hispanic parents and families, and seek ways to promote meaningful interaction beyond the simple greetings and waiting for parents to approach them. The occurrence of May 1, 2006 reveals the profound gap of understanding and communication between school assumptions and community reality, and will be our next topic in the final chapter.

## CHAPTER SEVEN—LEARNING FROM GALAX

In this chapter, I attempt to summarize answers to the research questions by describing a series of events and weaving the data into the final analysis. The chapter is divided into two main parts—schools and the town. I start by describing three events and addressing questions regarding schools and schooling, indicate areas that would benefit from further study, and follow with a vignette of the 2006 high school graduation ceremony; afterwards, I offer an analysis of the changes in the town of Galax. Finally, I offer a list of specific suggestions for schools and regional schools of education to improve the quality of education for Hispanic immigrant students.

### *The Event*

At the beginning of the research outline for this study, some committee members proposed that a significant event be the subject of a chapter or section. The event wasn't predetermined, but the idea was to choose a happening in the town that might illustrate some of the ways the town's residents make meaning of the event. When I heard about the international day that was started by the schools as a means of introducing the local community to the foods and dress of the "international" community members in town, that seemed to be the most appropriate choice. The authors of the event told me about it in response to my query as to what efforts had been made to involve the local community with the immigrant community, and they were very enthusiastic as to the impact the event had in making people aware of their new neighbors. On the day of the event, planned nearly a year in advance, when I arrived on the scene in the very center of downtown Galax, the event had been called off because of weather. Dozens of people had prepared food to sell and had to try to find other venues for their goods. In the case of the immigrants, the money that was involved in the venture was vital to their family economies. The Latino band went ahead and played a few songs in the downtown theatre, but they packed up and left early, as there was such a small turnout. The "event" for this study became a non-event. The following year (2006), the same event was pushed back to merge with another event in town.

Later, the Hispanic Service Organization (HSO), of which I am a member, decided to host a Health Fair, inviting more than a dozen organizations to donate their time and expertise, including on the spot physical examinations. It was reasonably well publicized, and the venue

was the Wal-Mart parking lot on a Sunday afternoon. More than a dozen stands were set up and a mobile medical clinic from Radford University was brought in. Dozens of people were ready to serve the needs of the Hispanic community. However, virtually no one showed up from the Hispanic community. People stood at the door of the Wal-Mart to inform Hispanics of the free medical help available a few steps away, and yet no more than a half dozen people came all day. The second “event” was also a non-event. As someone in the HSO remarked, “It wasn’t what we expected.”

### *The Schools*

*It opened my eyes. I don’t know everything I thought I knew.* (Principal reflecting on widespread absence of students May 1, 2006)

Then, May 1, 2006 came—a day that was expected to be just like any Monday in May for the schools and the local community. In April, the Hispanic immigrant community, including many undocumented who came out of the shadows in cities nationwide, along with non-Hispanic supporters, marched to protest the punitive measures in recent immigration legislature passed by the House of Representatives. Some Hispanic organizations called for a second march and a boycott of markets May 1, although not all of the participating organizations sanctioned this second march. The Galax Gazette printed an article that was titled, “Boycott of the Boycott” that indicated that there was the expectation in town that local Hispanics would not boycott schools or business in protest over the punitive measures the U.S. House of Representatives had signed, in which all undocumented aliens would become felons, and have no opportunity to become residents or U.S. citizens. I called over in the afternoon to find out what if anything had occurred locally and was informed that over 50% of the Hispanic students in middle and high school did not attend classes, and that a larger number of the elementary students were absent. Here is an excerpt from an interview with Principal Alvin Davidson a week later:

I is the interviewer and S is the participant, Mr. Davidson.

I: *I understand last Monday, May 1<sup>st</sup>, you had a little surprise when you came to school.*

S: *Certainly.*

I: *Can you describe that?*

*S: Certainly we did, you know that was the National Boycott of American Products and the unity of the Migrant Worker's Day, and I did not think it would affect this school or if it would, it would have been a minimal effect, and we actually had 83 Hispanic students out of school that particular day. It kind of surprised me. It was something that, you know, I told my wife as I walked out the door, I said, this isn't going to affect us today. And I got to go home and tell her it certainly did and it wasn't what we expected.*

*I: That was 83 out of?*

*S: About 105, 106 students.*

*I: Okay.*

*S: So, the majority of our absenteeism that particular day.*

*I: Okay. Well being an elementary school, it's pretty obvious that this was not a decision that the students themselves made but rather the parents.*

*S: Absolutely... that's exactly right. I think you have made a correct observation in that. That's not a student issue; it was a parental son/daughter, this is what we are doing today and this is why we are doing it... I understand that from a parental point of view...you know as a child you are going to obey your parents and certainly their values and morals are also your values and morals. It's certainly understandable.*

*I: So, what time of the morning did you realize this was happening?*

*S: Well, 7:30.*

*I: Oh really? That early?*

*S: Certainly. I do morning bus duty each morning from 7:30 until 8:00, and it was obvious as early as 7:30 that we were going to have a large absenteeism. Our breakfast line was almost, well it was much smaller than normal and most of our*

*Hispanic students participate in our lunch and breakfast program. The tables were almost empty so it took a while and that's when we knew that we were going to have to make an adjustment.*

*I: So, how did you respond to that? What was your initial reaction?*

*S: Well, at first I was a little upset. I thought you know why would you pull a child out of school for a day of basically learning? And then you know after I thought about it, much like you introduced it, is the fact their parents actually kept them out of school for that purpose, but the purpose wasn't to hurt the school, the purpose was to teach their child a lesson about why they are here and their importance to the economy, and certainly we saw how important they were to our school that particular day in the fact that we had to change our plans for lunch. We actually pulled our production down so we could accommodate, so we wouldn't be throwing food out the door. So, I guess initially you know at first I was a little disappointed.*

*I: Who were you disappointed in[the absence]?*

*S: Just the process. You know as a non-immigrant, relative to a recent immigrant I did not, I guess I still totally don't understand all the processes that those individuals go through to be a legal, legally, here whether it's a citizen or through the green card or a temporary worker, and certainly I understand why there would be anxiety on their end and need to show some type of national unity. I guess the thing that disappoints me is the fact that there are legal means for every person in this country to be here, and I think you know, and I don't know all their economic issues in all the Latin American countries that are represented in this particular school, but I guess you know I also understand if it means (feeding) your family its as simple as crossing over that border. That may be much easier than going through all of the paperwork and going through the immigration and nationalization services to get there. So, certainly it's easier just to walk across the border than to go through the proper channels to get that documentation.*

To their credit, the school administration showed restraint in their response following the initial shock, counting the absences as just that, and with no overt punitive reactions that I heard of, and that were reported in other areas of the country. Individually, and similar to Mr. Davidson's reaction, many teachers were unsympathetic to both the students' absence and to the purposes of the boycott nationally. As we talked, he recognized that the difference between what schools expected from the Hispanic community and what they actually did revealed a significant gap in understanding and on the level of communication between the two. While Mr. Davidson had a week to process it and a couple of days to prepare for the interview, it is very clear that what happened continues to be a mystery, and that feeling of mystery is a shared feeling among many in the school community. He, and they, have attempted to accept what happened and to move forward, although as he acknowledged, Mr. Davidson is nervous that something similar could happen at a more inconvenient time, such as during the mandatory SOL testing. He stated further: *"It opened my eyes. I don't know everything that I thought I knew."* When asked about the need to pursue a more vigorous dialogue with the Hispanic families, he stopped short of agreeing, indicating that he was not sure if steps like that would be within the definition of the school's responsibility.

The high school soccer team was mostly all absent from a required team practice May 1. The coach initially reacted by suspending all of those who were absent for the remaining matches for the year. Should he have maintained that position, the season would have been over for the team. Later, he modified his punitive response to giving a lengthy talk expressing his profound disappointment in the behavior of those absent May 1 and by suspending those absent players for the first 25 minutes of the next game, which the team went on to win. Reportedly, after the lengthy lecture, the coach asked if the players had anything to say. No one offered an explanation. As of this writing, the team, overwhelmingly Hispanic, has won the conference championship, has won the regional quarterfinals and is on to the semifinal game this week.

#### *Discussion of the need of cultural understanding.*

Each of the "non-events" and the event of May 1 reveal one fundamental truth: The native white community of professionals, who are largely a caring and concerned population, despite several years of interaction with their Hispanic immigrant constituents and fellow residents, are still learning about the needs, expectations, and behaviors of that community, as defined by them. As the elementary principal articulated so well, "I don't know everything I



thought I knew.” While the good intentions of non-Hispanics lead them to assess the needs of the Hispanic community and devise a plan to meet those needs, it is essentially an Anglo-centric approach that results in denying the Hispanics the opportunity to be involved in both defining their needs and devising means to solve them. Hispanics often respond by non-participation. Many of those who have worked the hardest on behalf of particular needs and with individual Hispanics and families are the people who express the most frustration and “disappointment” with the very people they have worked hard to support. They even become angry at times. There is a sense of “I have done all of this for you and you respond like that?” Hispanics may not respond at all, may not demonstrate appreciation, and even complain about something that was given to them or done for them, all of which grates against the “good upbringing” of members of the native Galax community.

The breakdown usually has to do with local people who use themselves, within the context of dominant culture, as reference points and who project their own beliefs and expectations upon the Hispanic community members, while the Hispanics are simply not as assimilated as folks may assume, and are continuing to use their own perspectives as reference for their actions. The Gringos <sup>7</sup>are just as much a mystery to them, in many cases, but they generally don’t concern themselves about that. They are normally busy trying to survive. Surviving means to apply the approach that generations of poor Mexicans have learned—give the *patrón* (the boss) what he wants within limits, and when his demands exceed willingness, feign compliance (say yes) and go do what you want anyway, which often means being absent from where the *patrón* wants you. It also might mean performing a task the way they want to do it rather than in the manner the *patrón* says. These are methods oppressed people use to subvert power, to preserve their own dignity as human beings, and to reinforce their self-worth and self-identities.

Hispanics also have to adapt to the manners and customs of the gringos, especially the manner in which most Anglo-Americans speak directly and to the point, without taking the pains to make potentially ego-damaging statements more palatable to the Hispanic. I am often amazed at their ability to withstand what would be considered verbal assaults from a Hispanic orientation, when that behavior would not likely be acceptable in Mexico. I have often witnessed

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<sup>7</sup> Gringo is a term for non-Hispanics, usually referring to Anglo-Americans, that may have negative overtones, depending on the context and tone, or may not. It does point out difference between non-Hispanics and Hispanics from the Hispanic perspective. I use it here from the neutral position and from the Hispanic perspective.

statements made by Anglo-Americans who demonstrate their lack of knowledge of the other, as they are often people with no ill will towards Hispanics, but who are not aware of how insulting some statements can be. Whether it is a disparaging comment about Mexico, a not-so-subtle comparison of cultures or countries, a racist joke, or simply a nationalistic viewpoint, there are many ways that Hispanics are offended. When that happens, they may simply clam up, like the boys on the soccer team after the coach told them about his disappointment in their behavior, and he asked them if they had anything to say. Or they may just go away, and you may not see them for a while. The Mexicans, especially, are a culture that is constantly negotiating with feelings and perceptions through minute subtleties of tone, inflection, word choice, silences, gestures, facial expressions, repair strategies, as well as actions. The complexity of social interaction is at a level that is largely impenetrable to a monolingual Anglo-American.

When the perceived rewards disappear from the relationship for the Hispanic, the tolerance of the stoicism is likely to vaporize as well. Mexicans are conditioned to defer to light-skinned people, but I think it is noticeable that the longer they interact with the white community in the U.S., slowly those old responses are giving way to a new framework for relationships based more on individual merit or power rather than homogenous elitism. Whether it is through dating, competing on the soccer field, or in the workplace, poor Mexican immigrants are learning they can compete with the gringos and come out on top. A few are learning they can compete in the classroom as well.

*Lessons learned in this study related to schools.*

May 1, 2006 revealed that Galax schools are not as knowledgeable of their Hispanic students and families as they might have thought. The policy of not knowing how many students are undocumented has merit, yet caring educators would want to know all they can about the students they teach. Teachers and administrators may continue to improve their service to their students by becoming more knowledgeable about their worlds. They would benefit the students by learning about the backgrounds of students, the reasons for migration from home communities, the hardships on the way, and their perspective on the current debate on immigration reform. They might improve the quality of education for the students by rethinking old policies that limit interactions with families to daily greetings at bus stops or drop offs, memos sent home, SPTA meetings, mandated calls home for absences, and otherwise waiting for parents to approach them. Mexican parents of modest means do not have the pattern of

approaching teachers and administrators in their home countries, and most of them are uncomfortable in the world of schools, especially schools that are all English speaking.

The U.S. is the host country, and representatives such as school personnel could take the lead in creating a true dialogue. As we saw in the last chapter, involving the families more directly in the educational process will likely produce even happier students, and begin to reduce the level of marginalization and dropout. Schools are often talking to and not listening to a community reluctant to speak and struggling to know and use the new language in a foreign land. I think the absence of May 1 can be a wake-up call to address the need to create a structure to have improved communication between the schools and the families.

Caring education is not limited to being kind, polite, “fair”, and well meaning. While a number of teachers and coaches have gone the extra mile by mentoring them and working on behalf of their students to be able to go on to college, there is more that might be done. Caring education involves a praxis of change when change is imperative. It is a tremendous challenge schools like Galax are facing, granted, but how can educators not respond to the challenge to become more knowledgeable of their students, including language and culture? There are opportunities for educators to be involved in seminars, classes, and even immersion learning experiences that will help them begin to see from the perspective of the other, to rethink their positioning in the relationships with students and parents of minorities and to demonstrate an environment of continuous education. If we want students to be life-long learners, who is providing the role model? Certainly, this study revealed some questions about the dispositions among some faculty members to work with English language learners and/or Hispanic immigrants. Where there are evidences of problems, schools need to be able to respond by offering further educational preparation to work with children who are different, and require accountability.

Administrators might work together to seek creative funding and provide other incentives for educators to pursue educational opportunities. Administrators might explore ways to involve the Hispanic community in the educational experience by tapping into what Moll and others call “funds of knowledge,” where members of local school communities share their skills and knowledge with the students in interactive participation (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992; Gonzalez, N., Moll, L.C., Floyd-Tenery, M., Rivera, A., Rendon, P., Gonzales, R., & Amanti, C., 1993). Efforts like this can greatly enhance the educational experience for children by making it

more meaningful; it can reinforce self-identity and self-worth by linking students and families to the schooling experience, and help bring the immigrants out of the shadows and more into the overall life of the school community.

*Language and Other Issues in Elementary, Middle, and High School*

One implication of a Vygotskian pedagogy of hope (Trueba, 1999), would mean revisiting underlying assumptions about the assimilationist approach to teaching English language learners, beginning in Pre-K. The exclusive use of the target language (English) appears to produce students who are able to function well as they move through the first years of school. By choosing that approach to teaching, which includes placing monolingual English teachers in charge, the Hispanic students are denied the use of their native language and culture in the overall learning process, with the resulting potential for identity crises and of actually slowing the learner's holistic progress. It is likely that the current need to spiral prior learned information continuously through the curriculum for memory purposes could diminish somewhat. Classrooms would likely be able to move at a quicker pace into more meaningful learning experiences if there were more dual language opportunities for these early learners.

*An interesting observation.*

In virtually every class I observed in the lower levels of elementary school, Hispanic students are constantly communicating with each other in Spanish. That fact indicates there is, in effect, a dual-language program operating unofficially in a program with an assimilationist approach. It is likely that the children themselves are learning at the "amazing" speed teachers and administrators attest to, not as a result of the monolingual English program, but as they work together to scaffold each other, and as they make meaning of their ever-changing environment. Teachers say they wish they knew what the students are saying to each other in those frequent mini-dialogues.

Teachers who largely have little or no training in ESL methods and nil Spanish skills are at a disadvantage for knowing what is inside the child's mind and heart, and disadvantage the children as a result. In the lower levels especially, the numbers of Hispanic children, e.g., 13 out of 18 in one Pre-K I observed, would seem to warrant teachers who might demonstrate reasonable fluency in the children's first language. They are also limited in their ability to interact at beyond a surface level with many of the parents, and thus the parents are further

removed from the learning experience. Now, the teachers are dependent on children to translate or trying to locate a translator from another part of the school. As good as they are, most of the teachers I observed and interviewed lack the knowledge and training to articulate a sound philosophical approach to teaching children who are English language learners. Most of them recognize their lack of training to be working with the student population they have, and the benefits being fluent in Spanish would bring to the equation. At least one teacher remarked about how excited some of her students became when they approached me (researcher) and we interacted in Spanish.

I did notice Hispanic students who seemed to be given different treatment in some of the classrooms in the elementary school, although it was unclear if there were issues of behavior or class management involved in teachers' decisions. My notes from one observation include the following:

*While most students were working in groups, two Hispanic girls were off working alone. One finished a task, checked in with the teacher, who assigned her another task on the computer. Isabel (one of the two working alone) was called to the teacher's side and reprimanded for not paying attention and for not performing the assigned task. The Hispanic students are very quiet and a contrast to the noise produced by the larger group. Isabel comes back to show her work to the teacher and the teacher asks, "Why are not all the pictures done?" Later, the teacher asks a question to a Hispanic girl, who does not respond; the teacher asks the same question in Spanish; still not much response. When they were preparing to leave the room, students gathered around me and asked to see (the computer); Isabel asked if I knew her name, and I said Isabel. She asked, "How did you know?" She informed me that she speaks Spanish and English; I spoke to her in Spanish and asked her what language she speaks at home. Her response: I am Mexican and speak Spanish, too. Another girl who looked Hispanic and worked alone, said she was Mexican, too. Native Galax children crowded around and wanted to know if I knew their name too: how to spell their names. I do wonder about the Latinas working alone and of Isabel's problems with following directions.*

For whatever reason, in that classroom, the Hispanic children were segregated and were given messages that they are different. There may be a number of reasons Isabel did not complete her tasks fully, within the assigned time limit, and that some of the Hispanic children

were so much quieter than the mainstream children. Perhaps she did not understand the assignment; she may feel oppressed in the all-English environment, and be very keenly aware that she and other Hispanic children are being given different treatment.

Concerning language, I think it is clear that for many educators in these good schools, Spanish language is considered a problem or “barrier” to overcome rather than an asset to learning. The insistence of some teachers to hold the early learners back over issues of language is illustrative of the need to revisit the underpinning philosophy of education. With a Freireian Vygotskian orientation, meaningful learning takes the forefront, prior knowledge is key to new learning, and the language code is learned in the context of performing learning tasks with experts and peers in a relaxed atmosphere. Teachers are less authoritarian and function more as expert facilitators providing scaffolding that is constantly being adjusted as learners’ Zone of Potential Development diminishes and their Zone of Actual Development increases in specific tasks.

#### *Middle school.*

Up until this year, the middle school was seen by a number of teachers as an environment that was hostile to the Hispanic children. Elementary teachers spoke of former students, ELL’s, who returned to speak of middle school teachers giving them failing grades even as they are working to the best of their ability. Clashes between Hispanics and other groups of students were also reported in the middle school. Middle and high school teachers were concerned that the Hispanic students were being given different treatment as far as discipline, also. Fortunately, there was an administrative change, and many report that there has been a significant overall improvement in this current year. There is no single ESL teacher for the middle school. Elizabeth Stringer serves both schools and her dual language classrooms have been described earlier in this study. There are a number of Hispanic immigrants who come into the school system in the middle school years, who have no prior experience in U.S. schools.

The presence of these students creates much more work for teachers in the current practice of the schools. Middle school teachers, who have no ESL training and no Spanish skills, discussed the problems they have with the noise level and with cooperative learning tasks, and their description of the Spanish language as a “barrier” and a problem indicates there are classroom environments that are not optimum for the Hispanic students. The pull-out ESL program is probably insufficient to provide all the learning needs these students have, and when

the preparation materials for the SOLs is mixed with the curriculum it is likely that the overall syllabi become suspect. These students need teachers who are understanding of their particular learning backgrounds and who are trained to work with them, both linguistically, through ESL methods or Spanish language skills, and pedagogically. They are also in need of at least a couple of teachers who are fluent in Spanish and who are immediately available without having to wait for the next visit from or to the high school.

*High school.*

The high school has similar needs, as Hispanic immigrants sometimes appear who have just arrived to the U.S. In some cases, students have come who have no prior schooling experience even in their home countries. Because of the brevity of time afforded these students for their high school education, their learning needs are very specialized. These are the years of highest risk of dropout, as the outside temptation to earn money either to help with family expenses or to become more independent woos these students. Whatever isolation or disenfranchisement they have experienced inside schools comes to an apogee, and the dream of higher education gradually becomes a mocking illusion, often due to public policy and family finances. I think the students who would fall into a similar category would be better served with an Individualized Education Program (IEP), or at least a well-thought out parallel curriculum for a homogenous group, rather than the current assimilationist approach. While the population of Hispanic students is currently lower in the high school than in the middle and elementary, that population is expected to rise, as the students move through the school system.

*Other suggestions for school improvement.*

Most of the participating teachers and educators in the study acknowledge that teachers are probably better teachers as a result of having English language learners in their classrooms, forcing them to rethink their assumptions about the learners they have and in some cases, their approach to teaching. I believe all would benefit from rethinking larger underlying beliefs about learning, as well as through educational experiences that would bring awareness of their practices that may be harmful to the learning for immigrant students. The Galax schools have made some admirable modifications in recent years to accommodate Hispanic immigrants. Should the Hispanic community remain stable or continue to grow numerically, they would be well advised to seek out new ways to take their program to the next level on two fronts—

linguistically and pedagogically. That would involve bringing in experts who might guide educators into rethinking their assumptions about learners of English from other cultures, becoming more knowledgeable about bilingual and dual-language learning, hiring more teachers who are fluent in Spanish, and by offering incentives to teachers to take classes to learn ESL methods, Spanish, and offer more in-depth training on working with people from the cultures represented. Educators might acknowledge the fact, as mentioned earlier, that the Hispanic children already have an unofficial dual-language environment underway, despite the official policy of English assimilation. Teachers could then be assisted in learning how best to work with that dynamic on the part of the students. Teachers also need informed guidance on classroom techniques that work, assessment tools that are fair and appropriate, and not be left alone to improvise.

Schools also would benefit all students and the future of Galax by seizing the moment as native students are now expressing a desire to learn Spanish as a second language from elementary through high school. Students and teachers who speak Spanish testify to the eagerness to learn Spanish among their peers and students. The 300+ who signed up for high school Spanish speaks volumes, as well as sends a clear message that one Spanish teacher is inadequate for the demand. A comprehensive Spanish language program might be designed for all three levels of schools with a potential result that Galax, as a community would have more to offer the business world by producing a large population of people who are fluent in more than one language. Local and outside businesses might be consulted for issues of funding. The first step of Spanish classes in the elementary and middle schools this year might be expanded upon, and the potential of a dual-language program is very much present.

#### *Teacher and Educational Administration Preparation*

Teachers who participated in this study overwhelmingly stated their belief that they did not receive adequate preparation to meet the educational needs of the student bodies they now have to work with. They agree that colleges and Schools of Education should be preparing future teachers with the skills and knowledge of how to work effectively with English language learners from different cultures. Administrators are in a position where they make decisions for teachers and students that reflect an approach to teaching based on beliefs about learning that appear biased rather than based on sound research. For example, the unofficial dual-language learning that is taking place in many classrooms contradicts the official approach administrators adhere



to, and also denies the efficacy of such an approach and the *need* Hispanic English language learners have to recur to these strategies. The “success” that is touted in the early grades where credit is given to the early English immersion needs a closer look. It is my belief that much of that success is due to the myriad of little mini discourse interaction between Spanish speaking children who are learning schooling together in peer assisted learning. This fact needs to “come out of the closet” in teacher and administrative educational preparation.

I believe that there is the possibility that subtle deceit is at work through the “success” of the schools as measured on the SOLs. It is a possibility that the acceptable grades in the elementary school on the SOLs could be a factor in the decision by administrators to continue doing what they are currently doing educationally, such as teaching to the test, rather than constantly looking to improve the overall education of their students. The good marks on the SOLs in elementary school, for example, could easily mask a slow disenfranchisement that begins for some Hispanic immigrant students due to assimilationist policies and be a factor that leads to potential dropout later in high school. Should administrators be evaluated on the students who graduate rather than the SOL scores in the case of immigrant children? Graduation rates are certainly more critical and would be a greater indicator of the success of the schools to accomplish their mission. Schools of education can help schools with questions like these, and provide guidance and feedback that would benefit schools and communities, as well as students.

Colleges and universities, especially at the departmental level such as Schools of Education, might rethink their relevancy to the needs of the communities they serve. The changing demographics in Virginia and in the Southeast would indicate the need of a fresh look at the kind of preparation schools of higher education are providing for teachers and administrators in training. As mentioned in the preceding paragraph, in-service teachers are speaking about the needs they have to serve adequately their student populations, and schools of higher education could be more attentive and responsive. It is astounding to me to realize the lack of interaction between Galax Schools, facing a whole new reality starting in the mid-1990s, and nearby Schools of Education. Shouldn't there exist a relationship where local school systems might contact leaders in schools of education, who in turn might have human resources available to provide short-term assistance such as seminars or short courses, and have recourse to educational researchers who might offer assistance to the particular needs of a town such as Galax?

### Areas of Further Research

There are several areas that warrant more research in schools in the Southeast, like the Galax system, that face challenges related to education for immigrant children or who are children of immigrants. I believe that the issues and needs of schools and Hispanic students in the Southeast differ significantly from those with more heavily populated, longer-term Hispanic populations with immediate access to Mexico such as California, Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas. Outside of Miami, the Southeast simply does not have the centuries old background of having a resident Hispanic culture, and lacks the sophistication and the resources the Southwestern states have developed. While there are factors that are applicable to Hispanic immigrants and schools here from research based in those states, there is much to learn about the new Latino Diaspora in the new Southeast.

Since schools in small towns are so intertwined and embedded in communities, I believe any study focused on schools will benefit by including the local community as an area of research. The phenomenon of dropout among Hispanics, but especially Mexican immigrants needs more research. A study that follows students from Pre-K through high school and that follows students who appear in the schools at later elementary, middle and high school years may help pinpoint hidden factors that motivate students to decide to leave school without a diploma. There is much to learn about the role of soccer as well as the potential learning that soccer offers to both immigrants and non-immigrants. As always, there is need for more research based on language, beginning in Pre-K and continuing through the high school years.

*Graduation, May 26, 2006.*

The gym of the high school, where the ceremony was held, is small and was quite stuffy after it began to swell with attendees. In fact, more than one speaker made mention of the heat factor. Since I arrived early, I had ample time to reflect, to observe people and place. I wondered how many people present had lost jobs or were facing job loss due to the factory closings, and were facing an uncertain future; how many graduates had little chance for higher education and had no prospects for reasonable employment locally. The sports banner on the wall was interesting in thinking about change as a result of immigration. The whitest, newest banner was in the category of soccer. The boys team was district champ in 1999, 2000, 2002, 2003, 2004,

2005, and are currently 19-0-1 , and well on their way to repeating this year. They were regional champs last year, advancing to the State semifinals.

I was intrigued by the regional linguistic flavor once again as the bleachers filled up, and the observers moved closer and closer together. One young lady spoke to an older lady who must have been a family member just behind me, “sit here,” which sounded like the verb had a second vowel and a y, like, “seeyat.” I was reminded of the extra challenge for English language learners to adapt to the regional sounds and meanings, and marvel at those students, like Martin and Vanessa who have mastered the local southern accent.



Judging by the last names (see Appendix C), there were 10 Hispanics who graduated, including at least one known graduate who is undocumented. The ceremony was well represented by the Black and Hispanic community supporting the graduates, and their combined presence seemed to be more than the small percentages graduating of each in the school. There were about the same number of Black and Hispanic graduates among the 72 graduates.



Vanessa Casas won 17,000 dollars in scholarships, but despite having the same GPA as a classmate, was not the valedictorian, the honor given to the other student due to her classmate's participation in the Governor's school. Vanessa became one of a group of "salutatorians," which had the effect of lumping her with a group of students that she was far ahead of in GPA, rather than singling out her remarkable accomplishment. From my biased perspective, and with respect to the valedictorian, I think the school and community missed a wonderful opportunity to hear something that really might have made an impact rather than all the "T's" from the so typical address that was given. Vanessa started out in Galax schools speaking no English and rose to the top of her class, working 36 hours a week to help meet her family's needs, and to save towards her hoped for college education. When she spoke, she did so with poise, appeared very relaxed, smiled a lot, and was obviously an enthusiastic supporter of her classmates during their presentations. She demonstrated class, and looked beautiful, also. I was able to meet her family, snap some pictures of her with them, and have a short interchange with her parents. Her mother was very tearful, and I think her dad also.

The tears that are normal in a graduation seemed to me to have a profound meaning for the Hispanic graduates, siblings, and family members. Perhaps I was just more in tune to their struggle, the long journey to this accomplishment considering the parents' status, the long journey to cross the border, make a living, to adapt to local conditions. In some ways, it is more of a dream come true than many parents, themselves having less than a middle school education, would have hoped for. The students overcame many adversities, not the least being the

temptation to dropout. The Galax schools, including teachers and administrators, should also be proud that they helped ten at risk immigrants or children of immigrants to receive their diplomas. Of course in this country, a high school diploma is only a first step in preparing oneself for better employment and a resulting higher quality of life.



### *Changes in the Town of Galax*

Small towns like Galax are fast-forwarded into the 21<sup>st</sup> century largely by forces outside of their local area, are forced to become sophisticated very quickly, and with very little resources and training from state and federal governments to do so. Hemispheric and global economic policies such as NAFTA have created job loss, rather than the promised increase in jobs in Mexico, especially in the areas of small farming, industrial, and service industries. Options for employment are extremely limited for much of the unskilled workforce. Larger groups of skilled workers have been laid off and smaller numbers of unskilled younger workers with decreased benefits have taken their place in many industries. More and more maquiladoras have shut down or moved operations overseas. Natural disasters have devastated economies in southern Mexico and Central America. The availability of jobs in recent years in towns like Galax provides the “pull” for a desperate and mobile work force to immigrate, as has occurred with the Hispanic population. Networking—the connections between people from a very tiny community in one of the smallest states in Mexico, provided the lines of communication to announce the availability of jobs in a peaceful and largely accepting community. Networking also meant the immigrants from Nayarit had friends and family members already living and working in the receiving community, and thus some initial support mechanisms and references with which to begin a new life.

Just as the schools, local communities like Galax are left to figure out what to do and how to adapt with a new cultural and linguistic community. Businesses who prosper as a result of cheap labor under conditions that empower employers may offer little back to the communities

by way of support for the change they in part fomented. In the case of the furniture factories in Galax, the reward for the town has been to see factories shut down, recur to imports, which is allegedly giving Vaughn Bassett a huge boost in sales nationwide but provides little for the local community, while the community is left with a substantial immigrant population who have fewer jobs available. The policies of “free” global and hemispheric markets are a misnomer for small towns like Galax, which are not invested in nor appraised by the global competitors and profiteers. Towns are strapped with increased costs in health, law enforcement, and schooling expenses among other areas.

Another aspect of the global and hemispheric forces affecting small towns like Galax is the current ambiguous immigration policy and practice that is so hotly debated in this country. There have been at least two immigration roundups over the past few years, but even more rumors and fear of raids. In one of the raids, allegedly a couple of workers actually leaped out of an upper story at one of the factories down by the river to flee the federal agents. I have been down to look at the site of that occurrence, and have to believe, were the story true, that a person would have to be extremely desperate to try and escape from that height. A little over a year ago, when flooding was widespread, especially in many of the trailer parks where the Hispanics live, the immigrants suffered alone or ran away from police who were trying to rescue them. Students testify that one of the primary causes of high school dropout is the fact that students know they will not be able to pursue a college degree due to immigration issues. Many of the benefits from state and federal agencies that immigrants otherwise qualify for are unavailable to those who cannot prove legal residency. The needs do not disappear, and so towns and communities are forced to bear the burden. Issues relating to the prevailing ambiguous immigration policies and practices put the town and the immigrant community on edge. Teachers fear that students and parents could be separated by punitive measures. Schools are bound by state policy that keeps them “blind” to knowing the status of students, while having to wrestle with the effects of students or families who are affected by being out of status or undocumented.

Churches of various denominations have stepped up to take on the role of providing immediate assistance for impoverished Hispanic immigrants. Churches have sought and acquired Hispanic ministers to emigrate or immigrate in order to minister to the needs of the newcomers. Churches also continue to provide numerous services for the Hispanic community, including translators, translations, and various social and essential goods and services. Churches have

sought to proselytize, but have also allowed the immigrants to choose the level of integration they are comfortable with, as exemplified by the number of participants who have enjoyed attending services in Protestant churches, but who continue to hold fast to their traditional Catholic roots and practices. I think it is safe to say that without the extraordinary efforts the local churches have made on behalf of the Hispanic immigrants, the town would be facing a completely different and more depressing reality. Under the approved house immigration bill, church members would also be felons for assisting the undocumented.

Individual cultural and linguistic mediators, often as a part of church efforts, have also played crucial roles on behalf of both the native residents of the town and in benefit of the immigrant community. It is truly extraordinary to see the efforts of people such as Elizabeth Stringer and others, who have learned Spanish fluently, and provide vital lines of communication between both cultural groups. As natives and members of the local community, this small group of people provide cultural mediation, interpretation, and often-practical solutions to issues that constantly arise. They are constantly involved in explaining the actions and meanings of one group to the other, which goes far beyond issues of language.

Another problem towns like Galax must deal with is the lack of a vehicle to have communication with the Hispanic immigrant community. There is no recognizable organization in the Hispanic immigrant community—there is no leader, mayor, or otherwise official representative. This creates problems for communication and understanding for both communities. For example, there were recently rumors of roundups by ICE related to some of the marches in April and May. Two immigration officials were spotted in town and people panicked, leaving town, shutting down businesses; one parent called a teacher and begged her to adopt her daughter and raise her because she knew she was going to be arrested. There was some contact with officials who indicated that the ICE agents were targeting one specific individual who was a wanted criminal, and that the rest of the immigrant population should not worry. Yet, there was no way to get out the message to the people. The flooding incident is another example where the town needed to be able to communicate to a widely scattered population with no visible unifying vehicle. In like manner, there is not a vehicle where specific concerns of the Hispanic community might be made to the local authorities. I believe it might help the town to propose the creation of an artificial but workable format to provide a means to communicate effectively with as many members of the community as possible rather than “through the

grapevine.” If Hispanics don’t do it on their own, communities may be well served by fomenting some instrument to do so, including providing incentives, yet avoiding top-down policies that bring fear and distrust in the Hispanic community.

Towns that are mostly warm and very accepting of immigrants like Galax still have race and class issues that are ongoing, and also inherit gender issues that the immigrant community bring with them. There is evidence of continual low-level tension between the small African American community and the Hispanics, who for now outnumber them, that starts as early as the elementary school, meaning there is tension at home. White students who carry anti-immigrant sentiment into the schools are almost certainly bringing their views from home, and perhaps some from the biased media coverage of recent immigration debates and events. Worker class tension between traditional residents and Hispanic immigrants is evident in private conversation and in public places like the local Hot-line in the Galax Gazette. The enormous loss of jobs that the town has experienced in the past few years adds fuel to the fires of xenophobia. The clash of the representative symbols of rebel flag and the Virgin of Guadalupe on tee shirts, cars, and in homes is unlikely to disappear as oppressed communities hold fast to metaphors of identity. There is risk of gang involvement as gangs are becoming more active recruiters and as marginalized youth search for identity, meaning, acceptance, and community.

### Final Thoughts

As of this writing, there are many unknowns concerning the future of Galax, caught, as other towns in the Southeast, in a sea of change facing the region and the hemisphere. There are more factory closings scheduled, and as to be expected, the unemployment rate continues to rise. Whether it will wither, as has nearby Fries, or if it will rebound with opportunities for it’s residents is yet to be determined. Governor Kaine visited the town in March, and has initiated plans to assist the community to prepare for new career options, to support the community with immediate aid, and to attract more business for the areas. Of course, many of the Hispanic community do not meet the residency requirements to qualify for state assistance.

So far, there has not been widespread exodus, even among the Hispanic community, although one Hispanic pastor allegedly reported that 20 families left his church to look for employment in another state. A number of the ever-resourceful immigrants have found employment at some distance from town, some in nearby Floyd, and others as far away as Washington, D.C., while thus far maintaining their residences in Galax. The unknowns for some



of the immigrants include their future as to be defined by congress. The two bills that have been passed in both houses are very different, and pundits predict that no solution will be forthcoming until after the November elections. The immigrants are used to being relegated, to ambiguous and contradictory signals, and to waiting.

Even so called “comprehensive” immigration proposals such as President Bush’s, are essentially monologues among people in the U.S. and generally limited with those who have power. “We” decide the fate of “them,” without acknowledging our role in creating their plight. To be truly comprehensive in addressing immigration, the U.S. must prioritize issues of development, education, security and democracy in the sending countries and communities and enter into long-term dialogues and commitments with those countries as partners (Knowles, 2006). Shared research and development projects on a wide-scale would include independent studies on the regional and transnational communities affected by global and hemispheric economic policy. The designers and politicians who favored treaties such as NAFTA failed in their estimation of the impact of migratory patterns. Changing economic borders, or perhaps better said, dissolving economic borders across traditional political boundaries impact the needs and requirements of supply and demand of business and workers.

Workers, similar to schools and towns like Galax, are left to work out their own salvation, and are penalized or threatened with being labeled felons and deported for crossing boundaries that are being continually traversed by capital and goods. Governments and global and hemispheric profiteers have not seriously addressed the implications of those treaties on immigration; the profiteers are not asked to bear the costs of immigration reform, nor issues of development in the sending communities. The lives of individuals and families, caught in a web of time and policy ambiguity, are often overlooked in policy debates between politicians. Immigrants and towns like Galax should not be left alone to resolve their particular issues relating to paradigm changes created by the powers that be. Towns and individuals should have assistance to mediate changes prevailing economic policies have helped create. Children born in the U.S. and that have worked hard to adapt to schools here should not run the risk of being either separated from their parents who do not have residency status, nor face being uprooted to return to the countries of their parent’s birth. Hard-working students who graduate should not be kept from higher education over outdated and unfair immigration policies.

*Some Specific Suggestions for Schools and Schools of Education.*

The following is a list of suggestions schools that are facing changes similar to those in Galax might consider to improve their instruction for Hispanic immigrant students, and for schools of education in the region where local communities are changing due to immigration:

- Schools might offer more Spanish classes to meet the demand of students, including hiring teachers who could offer innovative classes that would take advantage of the local Spanish-speaking population.
- Schools would be well served to acknowledge the existence of dual-language learning that the immigrant students have devised, and learn to work effectively with students during the years of transition into fully English language classrooms.
- Schools might offer incentives for teachers to develop proficiency in the predominant language of the immigrants—in the instance of much of the Southeast, Spanish would be the target language.
- Schools and Schools of Education (SOE) might collaborate to foment proficiency in the target language and culture for in-service teachers, perhaps through the recertification process.
- Schools and regional colleges and universities might collaborate on research that assesses the particular needs of communities facing significant change due to immigration. This could be fomented by the Virginia Department of Education as well as through communities, local schools, and regional colleges and universities.
- Schools and SOE could collaborate to design individual site instructional plans.
- Colleges and universities could develop a specific curriculum of Spanish for Educators, where teachers and administrators in preparation might be taking language classes simultaneously while taking the existing curriculum for teacher education.
- Colleges and SOE could include an immersion element for teachers and administrators taking Spanish for Educators that would expose them to cultural and linguistic factors of the target group.

- Colleges and universities might redesign teacher and administration education to include specific preparation for communicating with parents and students who are immigrants or refugees, as well as some knowledge of dominant immigrant groups in the state and region.

*Mexico, at home in Appalachia?*

In summary, I believe much has been learned by studying the lived experiences and perspectives of these two diverse communities who have merged in Galax. Immigration, birthed from economic policy and changing employment conditions in the U.S., Mexico and Central America, has restructured and impacted the lives of immigrants and native residents alike. Issues of race, class, and gender are very much alive in towns like Galax, which are impacted by global forces that include factory closings and immigration. Black-Hispanic and white-Hispanic worker class conflicts are present even in largely welcoming small communities in the South. Guadalupe and Johnny Reb symbols meet and contrast in the new South.

Schools have made remarkable adaptations while still having much to address in order to better serve the needs of the Hispanic community. Schools need local colleges' and universities' assistance, including their presence, as they seek to work out solutions to the needs of teachers and students in a period of changing demographics. While not all participants are happy with the changes, many describe a growing affection for individuals who are members of different cultural groups. Learning occurs inside classrooms, but also outside the classroom in school related activities. Learning occurs for members of the native community as well as the immigrants as the two interact with one another on a daily basis in churches, sports fields, in the workplace and in markets.

"Mexico" has adapted to local conditions and some of its citizens have made a home in Appalachia; a small immigrant community has managed to survive for a period. Some perceive a not-so-slow transformation occurring in the Southeastern states from a black-white society to a black-white-browning society, where descendents of North American Indians from what was called Mesoamerica have migrated north into areas where Native cultures have largely been exterminated, isolated onto reservations, or assimilated into dominant monolingual Anglo society. The Latinization of the Southeast is likely an ongoing and irreversible trend, regardless of the possibility of more restrictive immigration policy and enforcement. Interracial marriages and unions are creating a new mestizaje in the South.

Hispanic children have grown up in Appalachia and speak two languages. A few have excelled and have a bright forecast, although fraught with challenges. Many will continue to battle for low-wage jobs, competing with other immigrants and native workers. Many of the local residents have welcomed the immigrants, while most Hispanics still feel they are “different,” including the most assimilated. Many Hispanics say they plan on returning to the home countries; for the present, however, most seem to continue to live, work, study, worship, and work out the unfolding of their lives in Appalachia.

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## APPENDIX A – INFORMED CONSENT/IRB APPROVAL

**Informed Consent**

**Project Title:** Winds of Change: Mexico at home in Appalachia

**Principal Investigator:** John W. Knowles, III. **Advisor:** Dr. Terry Wildman

**Purpose:** To conduct an interview that will focus on personal experiences and observations related to work, participation in churches, schools, and community action groups. The principal purpose of the interview is to inquire about your experience with people of other languages and cultures from the perspective of your own.

1. I hereby agree to participate in an interview in connection with the project known as Winds of Change: Mexico in a town in Appalachia. The **purpose** of the research is to examine the perspectives of the lived experience of change due to immigration.
2. **Procedure:** I understand that I will be asked to participate in at least one interview, which will take no longer than 90 minutes. I understand that my participation is voluntary, and I will be asked about my experiences and perspectives concerning adapting to new neighbors who speak a language different than my own, and who may be citizens of another country.
3. I understand that I can **withdraw** from the project and the interview at any time without penalty of any kind. In the event that I withdraw from the interview or the project, any tape made of the interview will be either given to me or destroyed, and no transcript will be made of the interview. I may withdraw without penalty by simply requesting to do so by speaking to John Knowles or by contacting Dr. Terry Wildman at the number given on this form.
4. I understand that I will receive no compensation for my participation in this project, though I will be given a copy of the transcript for my own records.
5. I understand that there are no known **risks** to participating in this project, though it may be difficult at times to discuss some personal experiences I wish to share. I also understand that there are no personal **benefits** for participating in this project.
6. **Confidentiality:** I understand that the interview will be audiotaped. In the interview, I will be identified by my real name or by a pseudonym should I request. If I choose, I may remain anonymous in any transcript, tape, and reference to any information contained in the interview. Although anonymity cannot be guaranteed, every possible measure will be taken to assure mine, should I request. The tapes will be used as documents for transcription purposes and archived at Virginia Tech after the completion of the project.



7. This project has been approved, as required, by the Institutional Review Board for Research Involving Human Subjects at Virginia Tech Polytechnic Institute and State University, by the Department of Teaching and Learning.
8. If I feel I have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or that my rights as a participant in the research have been violated during the course of this project, I know I can contact Dr. David Moore, Chair, IRB, Research Division, Virginia Tech, or Dr. Terry Wildman, at the phone number listed below.
9. I voluntarily agree to participate in this study and agree to be interviewed according to the terms outlined above. I have read and understand the Informed Consent and conditions of this project. I have had all my questions answered, I hereby acknowledge the above and give my voluntary consent for participation in this project.
10. Should I have difficulty reading this form, I agree to have it read to me.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant's Permission Date \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Witness (optional in most instances) Date \_\_\_\_\_

Should I have any questions about the research project or procedures, I may contact:

John Knowles  
Primary Investigator  
(540) 231-7568

Dr. Terry Wildman  
Advisor  
(540) 231-9109

Dr. David Moore  
Chair, IRB  
(540) 231-4991

Dr. Jan Nespor  
Departmental IRB Representative  
Teaching and Learning  
(540) 231-5347

This Informed Consent is valid from \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_.

**Participants will be given a copy or duplicate original of this consent form in Spanish.**

**Galax City Public Schools**

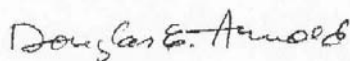
223 Long Street  
Galax, Virginia  
24333  
(276) 236-2911  
(276) 236-5776 Fax

February 4, 2005

To Whom It May Concern:

Consent is granted to primary investigator John W. Knowles, III to conduct taped interviews with middle-school and high-school students of the Galax City school system who choose to participate in a study titled "*Winds of Change: Mexico at home in Appalachia*." Mr. Knowles is granted permission to contact faculty members who may choose to participate in the study, and also to observe classroom instruction and other school related activities in the Galax schools that may contribute to the purposes of the study. Additionally, Mr. Knowles may request to examine administrative documents that are related to the study. Students and an authorized caregiver and all other participants may choose to have their names substituted by a pseudonym or may withdraw from the study at any time. The appropriate Internal Review Board consent forms will be signed by all participants. It is expected that Mr. Knowles will conduct himself professionally at all times throughout the period of research.

Sincerely,



Douglas E. Arnold, Ed.D.  
Assistant Superintendent

IRB Request for Expedited Review Protocol  
Winds of Change: Mexico at Home in Appalachia  
Investigator: John W. Knowles, III

Justification for the Study

This study examines the lived experiences and perspectives of native residents of a small town in Southwest Virginia and those of Hispanic immigrants whom have experienced change due to emigration. The mostly Anglo European target community received the first Spanish-speaking child in school in 1994 and this year has putatively 20% Hispanic children in the elementary school. The study may offer insights into those interested in changes occurring in similar communities in the South. It may be helpful to educators involved in educating immigrant children or those in higher education preparing teachers and school administrators for the same. The settings for the observations are schools, churches, places of employment and markets. I address the questions: What can be learned from the lived experience and perspectives of two diverse communities who merge in a small town in SW VA? What has been the nature of learning from each other as the immigrants have assimilated or adapted into the community? What has been the adaptation of the schools as they have attempted to deal with the influx of Hispanic children? What frames of reference do various participants use to judge their degree of comfort/satisfaction with the adaptations they are making? How does learning occur in schools, churches, places of employment, and market settings?

Procedures

Participants:

Interviewees are selected purposefully to meet a profile including:

Families: One or two families native to Galax who have more than one child who are students in the local schools, one or two immigrant families who have more than one child who are students at the same schools. The families are selected after consulting with various local community members including school personnel, pastors and advocates for immigrants based on criteria of willingness, availability, and with no particular educational background, social standing, or political ideology.

School personnel: a target number of 5 Teachers, a principal, a school superintendent

Community members: Including church members, pastors, priests, employers from the business community, people involved in Latino advocacy, and local government officials.

Students: A target number of 20 Middle-school and high school students. An effort will be made to have a balanced profile based on gender and ethnicity. Students will be interviewed at school, and/or at their homes with at least one parent present. Interviews will last no more than 45 minutes.

Participant Researchers: Additionally, two participant researchers from the local Galax community will be solicited to assist in the gathering of data.

#### Qualitative Study:

This qualitative case study looks at one community in SW Virginia.

#### Interviews:

Audio interviews will be conducted in the homes of participants, schools, churches they attend, or other locales chosen by or agreed to by participants. Interviews will be semi-structured and open. The participants are provided with the appropriate informed consent to read in the language of their choice (English or Spanish) to sign and a copy to keep. A copy of the initial informed consent is in the Appendix. Consent forms will be filed. Participant permission to record the interview will also be taped. Participants will be offered the choice of having pseudonyms, or of using their actual names. The tapes will be transcribed and kept at the residence of the investigator, and archived at Virginia Tech after the completion of the project. The investigator will employ focus groups of students, parents, and teachers among other candidates for collecting information. Interviews with focus groups will follow the protocol above. Participants will have the right to edit interviews during member checks. Interviews with adults will last no longer than an hour.

#### Observation:

Observations of elementary, middle and high-school classrooms and school related activities, places of employment, church activities, and market settings, and participation/observation of community action committees provide data for analyses.

#### Documents and artifacts:

Newspapers, video, photos, school administration documents and other documents and artifacts will be collected for analysis. Any correspondence by email or other device will be assessed in collecting data. Participants will have the right to request that any personal objects or images be deleted or destroyed from the final document.

#### Risks and Benefits:

There are no anticipated benefits to participants, although there may be the possibility of benefit for families and/or students if the study influences educators to address issues that may arise. The two participant researchers may receive a monetary compensation for their efforts in an amount yet to be determined, dependent upon time commitments, but not to exceed \$500. Unknowingly to the investigator, there is a possibility that some participants may be considered “undocumented” or “illegal aliens,” and be at risk to become targets for immigration officials. The investigator will maintain a position of neutrality should that occur. Otherwise there are no anticipated risks, with the exception that some participants may experience emotional stress by recalling experiences or memories that are unpleasant.

#### Confidentiality and Anonymity:

Participants will be encouraged to allow their true names used in the final document. Should a participant request anonymity, a pseudonym will be used. In the case of minors, both the minor and the adult caretaker must agree to have their true names used; otherwise, pseudonyms will be used.

#### Informed Consent:

An informed consent form is provided for each interviewee, including parental permission for any child under the age of 18.

#### **Sample Questions for Immigrant Students:**

How old were you when you moved to Laurel?

Did you attend school in Mexico (name of town will be substituted for Mexico when that is known)?

What was school like there?

What is school like here?

What do you like about school here?

Are some subjects more difficult than others?

Can you think of some examples of when you misunderstood a teacher or when a teacher misunderstood you?

Do you have some good friends from here? What are they like?

What kinds of things do you and your friends enjoy doing?

**Sample Questions for native resident students from Laurel:**

**Note:** The interview and questions will be conducted in Spanish, or a combination of English-Spanish should the students prefer.

Do you have some friends who are from other countries that speak Spanish?

What are they like?

Do you think school is difficult for them? If so, why do you think?

Has school changed at all, and if so, how do you see it?

What do you enjoy doing with your friends outside of school?

Do you think you've learned new things from the Mexican students? What kinds of things have you learned?

Do most of your friends from here enjoy having the Mexicans in school and in town?

If you go to church, do any Spanish-speaking people go there too? Has church changed at all?

Sample interview questions:

1. Can you describe how Galax has changed in recent years?
2. How have you noticed local residents responding to their new neighbors from Latin America?
3. How have you experienced change in your church? Place of employment? Schools? Shopping?
4. Have you learned new things from your neighbors, or as a result of their presence? Any new words? Eating habits? Culture awareness? Government policy? The global market?
5. How would you characterize the recent changes you describe? How do your traditional neighbors view this issue?

6. Have you personally experienced any situations where there have been miscommunication with the Hispanic community? Any humorous incidents? Any that led to problems?
7. How would you compare the values of Hispanics with yours?
8. What do you see as the challenges for native Galax residents? And for the Hispanic community members?
9. Did you participate in the International Day event? Can you describe that experience? Did you learn anything through that event? Is there something you would like to learn or understand about/from your new neighbors?
10. What are some concerns or questions you have related to this issue? What might help folks to better understand each other? What suggestions do you have for anyone experiencing similar changes?

Sample questions for members of the Hispanic community: (English version for committee)

1. How would you describe your life in your hometown? Work? Religious practice? Shopping?
2. How has your life changed by emigrating to Galax?
3. How have the local residents received you?
4. What have you learned by living here?
5. Can you describe your experiences at church? On the job? Schools? Shopping?

6. Have you experienced mis-communication with local residents? Were they due to language issues? Cultural issues? Any humorous incidents? Any that led to problems?
7. How has your own language changed by being here?
8. Have you learned new words?
9. What are your concerns for yourself? Your family members?
10. Would you like to see any changes anywhere? Schools? Churches? Employment?

**Did you participate in International Day? Describe the event.**





**Institutional Review Board**

Dr. David M. Moore  
 IRB (Human Subjects) Chair  
 Assistant Vice President for Research Compliance  
 CVM Phase II- Duckpond Dr., Blacksburg, VA 24061-0442  
 Office: 540/231-4991; FAX: 540/231-6033  
 email: moored@vt.edu

DATE: February 8, 2005

**MEMORANDUM**

TO: John Knowles EDCI T&L 0313  
 Terry M. Wildman Teaching and Learning 0453

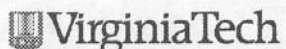
FROM: David Moore 

SUBJECT: **IRB Expedited Approval:** "Winds of Change: Mexico at home in Appalachia"  
 IRB # 05-079

This memo is regarding the above-mentioned protocol. The proposed research is eligible for expedited review according to the specifications authorized by 45 CFR 46.110 and 21 CFR 56.110. As Chair of the Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board, I have granted approval to the study for a period of 12 months, effective February 7, 2005.

Virginia Tech has an approved Federal Wide Assurance (FWA00000572, exp. 7/20/07) on file with OHRP, and its IRB Registration Number is IRB00000667.

cc: File



Office of Research Compliance  
Institutional Review Board  
1880 Pratt Drive (0497)  
Blacksburg, Virginia 24061  
540/231-4991 Fax: 540/231-0959  
E-mail: moored@vt.edu  
www.irb.vt.edu  
FVA000000721 Expires 7/2007  
2105 # 48 000000000000

DATE: April 12, 2006

MEMORANDUM

TO: John Knowles  
Terry M. Wildman

FROM: David M. Moore 

Approval date: 2/7/2006  
Continuing Review Due Date: 1/23/2007  
Expiration Date: 2/6/2007

SUBJECT: **IRB Expedited Continuation 1:** "Winds of Change: Mexico at home in Appalachia",  
IRB # 05-079

This memo is regarding the above referenced protocol which was previously granted expedited approval by the IRB. The proposed research is eligible for expedited review according to the specifications authorized by 45 CFR 46.110 and 21 CFR 56.110. Pursuant to your request, as Chair of the Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board, I have granted approval for extension of the study for a period of 12 months, effective as of February 7, 2006.

Approval of your research by the IRB provides the appropriate review as required by federal and state laws regarding human subject research. As an investigator of human subjects, your responsibilities include the following:

1. Report promptly proposed changes in previously approved human subject research activities to the IRB, including changes to your study forms, procedures and investigators, regardless of how minor. The proposed changes must not be initiated without IRB review and approval, except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subjects.
2. Report promptly to the IRB any injuries or other unanticipated or adverse events involving risks or harms to human research subjects or others.
3. Report promptly to the IRB of the study's closing (i.e., data collecting and data analysis complete at Virginia Tech). If the study is to continue past the expiration date (listed above), investigators must submit a request for continuing review prior to the continuing review due date (listed above). It is the researcher's responsibility to obtain re-approval from the IRB before the study's expiration date.
4. If re-approval is not obtained (unless the study has been reported to the IRB as closed) prior to the expiration date, all activities involving human subjects and data analysis must cease immediately, except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subjects.

cc: File

*Invent the Future*

VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE UNIVERSITY AND STATE UNIVERSITY  
An equal opportunity, affirmative action institution

## APPENDIX B – SOCCER SCHEDULE



## Galax Maroon Tide 2006 Soccer Schedule

Galax High School  
Maroon Tide Drive  
Galax, Virginia 24333  
(276) 236-2991



DATE	OPPONENT	LOCATION	TIME
<b>March</b>			
16	Geo. Wythe	Home	6:00
23	Glenvar	Away	6:00
27	Auburn	Home	6:00
28	Carroll Co.	Away	6:00
30	Geo. Wythe	Away	6:00
<b>April</b>			
3	Giles	Away	6:00
11	Glenvar	Home	6:00
13	Giles	Home	6:00
20	Auburn	Home	6:00
25	Grayson Co.	Home	6:00
27	Ft. Chiswell	Away	6:00
<b>May</b>			
2	Narrows	Home	6:00
4	Grayson County	Away	6:00
8	Carroll Co.	Home	6:00
9	Ft. Chiswell	Home	6:00
11	Narrows	Away	6:00

## OFFICIALS

Coaches ..... David Sexton, G.J. Sand  
Athletic Director ..... Bill Sutherland  
Principal ..... Bill Sturgill  
Statisticians ..... Nicki Boyette, Melissa Laws

## ROSTER

NO.	NAME	GR.
1	Amos Shen.....	11
2	Jorge Mendez .....	9
3	Cristian Mendez.....	11
4	Edgar Lopez.....	10
5	Manuel Echeagaray.....	9
6	Oscar Lopez.....	12
7	Angel Avila.....	11
8	Sarah Crawford.....	12
9	Dio Rodriguez.....	10
10	Gabriel Cisneros.....	10
11	Luis Moreno.....	10
12	Luis Flores.....	9
13	Alfonzo Quezada .....	9
14	Emanuel Guzman.....	9
15	Steven Flores.....	9
16	Carleigh Griffeth.....	10
17	Josh Sexton.....	10
18	Luis Rosales.....	10
19	Aaron Osborne.....	9
20	Charley Adams.....	9
21	Omar Salinas .....	9
22	Jose Hernandez.....	10
23	Jaime Lopez .....	10
Goal	Charley Adams .....	10

Go  
Maroon  
Tide

## 2006

# Commencement Exercise

# GALAX HIGH SCHOOL

# Galax, Virginia



**Friday, May 26, 2006 - 7:30 P.M.**

# HIGH SCHOOL GYMNASIUM

Jessica Leah Adams	Caitlin Brienne Jennings
Wayne Adam Amburgey	Stefan Micah Kilton
Vanessa Jean Avila	Sarah Ann Largin
Sarah Elizabeth Beamer	Amy Alexis Lawson
Christopher Aaron Blevins	James Linden Stone
Bradley Aaron Brown	Elisette Delacruz Lopez
Zachary Todd Brown	Oscar Lopez
Matthew Garrott Burruss	Elliott Cole Mallory
Vanessa Casas	Samuel Wade Martin
Lindsay Paige Caudell	Thomas Cameron Mauck
Wilbert Jamar Chandler	Brooke Anne McCulloch
Catherine Elaine Colina	Naomi Joellella Michelle McKinney
Shanna Michelle Combs	\$ Christopher Robert Messner
Tony Lamar Cottrell	Genevieve Caruthers Meyers
Anthony Louis Cox	Daniel Warner Moss
Sarah Elizabeth Crawford	Andrew Thomas Nichols
Holden Thomas Crockett	Justin Christopher Patton
Christopher William Moore Davis	Samantha Nicole Ray
James Edward Davis II	\$ Dominique Marie Reeves
Julia Ann Davis	Victor Guadalupe Rosales
Michael Scott Dorsey II	Marty Jaymes Santos
Mason Robert Engelhardt	Lorianne Elizabeth Sawyer
Joey Daniel Esquivel	Jarrod Isaac Sexton
Ashland Gray Evans	Jessica Whitney Lynn Shaffner
Terrance Shay Evans	Jacob Matthew Shanks
Kendall Alexander Fitzgerald	Christopher Thomas Sizemore
Marlene Denise Flores	Baylor Frances Snyder
Heath Brandon Ford	\$ Nina Marguerite Spengler
Kerry Maureen Fowler	Joshua Uriah Thomson
Kimberly Nicole Funk	Emily Marguerite Vaughan
Nathan Charles Haigler	Jennifer Meagan Vaughan
Corey Dean Hodges	John Edward Vaughan
Darrell Alexander Holliday	Amber Elaine Walker
Nichole Angellynn Horton	Anastasia Brittany Ward
Alexandra Michelle Hurst	Nathan Tyler Weathers
Travis Ryan Jefferson	Christopher Dean Wilmouth

## USHERS

John Moses Nester  
Christopher Pryor  
Heather Thompson

† Claudia Guzman  
† Savannah Kirby  
Amea JoBeth Liddle

† Head Users

# COMMENCEMENT EXERCISE

Friday, May 26, 2006 – 7:30 P.M.

## High School Gymnasium

*PROCESSIONAL . . . "Pomp and Circumstance" . . . . .	Elgar Galax High School Band
*PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE . . . . .	Miss Samantha N. Ray
*NATIONAL ANTHEM . . . . .	Galax High School Band
WELCOME . . . . .	Mr. William H. Sturgill, Principal
REMARKS . . . . .	Dr. Thomas R. Morris Secretary of Education, Commonwealth of Virginia
REFLECTIONS . . . . .	Miss Nichole A. Horton President, Senior Class
SALUTATORIAN . . . . .	Miss Vanessa Casas Mr. Kendall A. Fitzgerald Miss Samantha N. Ray Miss Emily M. Vaughan
VALEDICTORIAN . . . . .	Miss Kerry M. Fowler
SPECIAL MUSIC . . . "The Great Locomotive Chase" . . . . .	Robert Smith Galax High School Band
PRESSENTATION OF DIPLOMAS . . . . .	Mr. William H. Sturgill Mr. William H. Sutherland, Assistant Principal
*RECESSIONAL . . . . . "Pomp and Circumstance" . . . . .	Elgar
SENIOR SPONSORS . . . . .	Ms. Jean Campbell-Kuhn, Head Ms. M-L Copeland Cruey, Guidance
Mrs. Debbie Adams	Mr. Kim Gillespie
Mrs. Sandra Combs	Mrs. Babette Nuckolls
Ms. Carolyn Frost	Mrs. Angela Markins
	Mrs. Dionne Tucker
	Ms. Charlene Socks

\* Audience, please stand

*"Bear in mind that the wonderful things you learn in your schools are the work of many generations, produced by enthusiastic effort and infinite labor in every country of the world. All this is put into your hands as your inheritance in order that you may receive it, honor it, add to it, and one day faithfully hand it on to your children. Thus do we mortals achieve immortality in the permanent things which we create in common."*

—Albert Einstein