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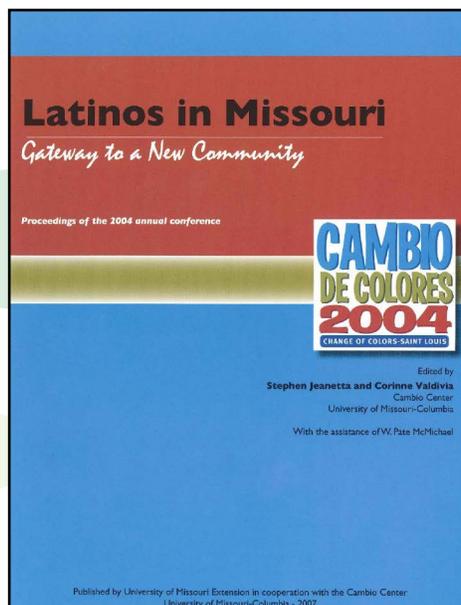
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The Effects of Increasing Hispanic Presence on Cultural and Educational
Interaction in Monett, Mo.

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This research study focused on identifying cultural interactions in terms of resistance, adaptation, and transformation within the educational experience of the Hispanic and non-Hispanic populations located in Monett, Mo., R-I Public School District. Identified cultural/ethnolinguistic groups within this study include: Hispanic, White (White Non-Hispanic), and other (African-American, Native-American, Asian-American, Multicultural, and non-Hispanic foreign nationals, etc.). Specifically the Hispanic and White groups were the focus of this study.¹ These two groups make up the majority of the Monett R-I student population. An attempt was made to interview students from other identified groups to provide a holistic context in terms of the educational setting. Unfortunately no students from other identifiable groups agreed to be interviewed.

Within the past decade (1990-2000), the school district has seen a significant increase in its Hispanic population. It serves Barry County, Mo. According to the United States Census Bureau, the county saw its Hispanic population grow from 152 in 1990 to 1,713 in 2000. Currently 5 percent of the population in the county is Hispanic compared with the state of Missouri at 2.1 percent (<http://mcdc2.missouri.edu/>). As reported by the superintendent of Monett R-I, the current school district population is approximately 12 percent Hispanic (Phone interview, February 2002). This indicates that there has been a significant change in the demographic makeup of the student population within the past ten years both culturally and linguistically. The goal of this study was to identify the various interactions due to these demographic changes. Issues of language, national identity formation, and gender roles were specific categories of cultural interaction that were examined. Through qualitative research methods—including open-ended interviews, classroom observation, and document analysis—the identification of incidents of cultural resistance, adaptation, and transformation was documented and analyzed to better inform and prepare students, parents, teachers, and administrators within the school district.

Purpose

The problem was to identify the significance of cultural interaction within the educational setting as it pertains to issues of cultural resistance, adaptation, and transformation. Assuming that culture maintains its identity by the formation of specific values and norms and assuming at the same time, that culture is dynamic and therefore defends, questions, and rejects or reforms its values and norms throughout the passage of time and due to interaction among its group members and with members outside of its group, the study of issues of resistance, adaptation, and transformation is possible. The increase in the Hispanic population within the county as described in the introduction provided a prime field of investigation of these cultural interactions. As first generation Mexican and Mexican-Americans make up the majority of the Hispanic population in the county, the issues of language (Spanish and English), national identity formation (Mexico and United States), and gender roles in terms of first- and second-generation Hispanic families— as compared with White, non-Hispanic—gender-role perceptions may be identified and analyzed within the setting of the school district.

The significance of this research is its contribution to the understanding of multiculturalism within the U.S. public-education system. More specifically, it provides new data on the midwestern educational experience as its Hispanic population continues to increase at a significant rate. Monett R-I is a prime case-study opportunity as it has had very recent demographic changes that provide evidence to how and what cultural interactions take place when there is a new cultural influence into an educational setting. In addition, the work is significant as it provides some applicable information for students, parents, teachers, and administrators within the Monett and wider southwest Missouri area in terms of what issues arise and how

¹ The term Hispanic was used throughout the study because all participants of Mexican origin self-identified as Hispanic. The term White was used throughout the study because the vast majority of Anglo or White non-Hispanic participants self-identified as White. This self-identification was based on the interview question, “What ethnicity do you consider yourself?”

participants in these communities react and address such issues within such cultural interaction.

Objectives of the study were to identify and describe the cultural/ethnolinguistic interactions in terms of cultural resistance, adaptation, and transformation within the educational setting. Resistance is defined as the attempt to maintain one's core cultural norms and values. Adaptation is defined as the attempt to modify one's core cultural norms and values to another culture. Transformation is defined as the outcome, intended or not, of the interaction of two or more cultures resulting in the creation of cultural norms and values that were not formerly present in any of the involved cultures. It was the goal of this study to identify and analyze cultural interactions due to the recent demographic changes within the school district. Issues of language, national-identity formation, and gender roles are specific categories of cultural interaction that were examined during this study. It was also the goal of the researcher that the information in this study be shared with private and public interest groups in an effort to improve the educational process for all students within the school district and similar midwestern communities. This second goal is in alignment with the proposed purposes of critical pedagogy as "active" research that impacts and influences the educational process and its outcomes in order to provide for a more equitable education system.

Theoretical Framework

This study used as its research basis critical pedagogy to question the roles of culture in the education process. Critical pedagogy in this research is used to look at the cultural interactions and the impact within the educational setting. It is localized to a southwest Missouri school district which adds more specific information in the form of case study analysis to the field of critical pedagogy. Cultural and language issues addressed in this research built on earlier analysis of Hispanic or Latino educational studies by providing insight into these issues within a midwestern-U.S. experience. This is rare as the majority of case studies have been conducted on the East and West coasts and in Texas where there are comparatively larger Hispanic populations. Finally, this research built on prior research in the area of language and education as it identifies language issues presented within the context of a southwest Missouri school district. It in part looks at questions of how students perceive language choice and usage within the educational context. Again this provided information from a midwestern area that formerly has had minimal research conducted in the area of bilingualism and education.

Research Design and Methods

Qualitative procedures including open-ended interviews and classroom observations were used to collect data for this research project. Participants were chosen from Monett High School and the Southwest Area Career Center within the school district. Returned request and permission forms were used to identify students, parents/guardians, and faculty participants in order to schedule interviews and classroom observations. Full disclosure of the methods and procedures used in the study were provided to each participant, and their consent was obtained before any interviews were conducted.

Analysis

Analysis of the data collected was based on Grounded Theory. It was used to code data for main categories based on participant information identifying language, national or ethnic identity formation, and gender roles within the further identified areas of cultural resistance, adaptation, and transformation. This information was then interpreted to describe the current status of cultural interactions with the context of the educational setting within the school district. In addition, some recommendations by the researcher were made based on these observations.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions were made based on input from participants and the classroom observations. Some similarities, demonstrating adaptation, across participants were identified. These included a consistent trust of the school administration to be supportive of students, generally strong indication by students of a desire for cross-cultural interactions and the development of such relationships, and the observation that such

interactions were limited to date. Some differences, demonstrating various levels of resistance or transformation, were identified. Specifically for the Hispanic students, there was a noted desire to include more content on Mexico and Mexican heritage within the social studies curriculum and also within the school agenda. Some parents (both Hispanic and White) noted racial discord within the community, while the majority either did not comment or felt that people were responding in a positive and supportive manner to demographic changes within Monett. Finally, there was mixed response—demonstrating a range of adaptation, resistance, and transformation—to the effectiveness of the current bilingual program within the district and at the high school.

Recommendations were made based on these observations. In brief, a recommendation was made to expand the bilingual program to a transitional program rather than a pullout program. Cultural activities should be adopted by the schools to allow students and families to share cross-cultural information. In this regard sensitivity should be demonstrated to make certain that Hispanic expectations of formal invitations and bilingual communications be implemented, as well as their involvement in the planning of such activities. Other recommendations were made in terms of faculty and staff training to enable both expansion of the curriculum and to support cross-cultural understanding for the wider context of the education institution and its surrounding community.

Dissemination of this research was accomplished by providing a copy of the results to the Monett R-I Public School District Office of the Superintendent and the High School and Career Center administrators. Participants were notified that copies were available for their review through the building administrators. The research results were provided in Spanish and English. It is the hope of the researcher that the school district and community will give serious consideration to the study outcomes. It is hoped in particular that the voices of the students in their desire to share cross culturally and to learn from each other's experience will not get lost or be set aside due to the bureaucratic realities of the education system. It has to be recognized that there is no "quick fix," and change will only come with consistent effort. This change may be realized with the implementation of programming that provides cross-cultural education for all those involved. In this way there will be positive changes that support Hispanic and White students—making a better today and tomorrow for the residents of Monett, Mo., and for everyone beyond this community.