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## **Latinos and Education: A Critical Reader**

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## BOOK REVIEW

### Latinos and Education: A Critical Reader

Antonia Darder and Rodolfo Torres (Eds.)  
New York, NY. Routledge, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition 2014  
398 pages, \$170.00 USD (hardcover), \$68.95 USD (paperback)  
ISBN: 978-0-415-53709-4 (hardcover), 978-0-415-53710-0 (paperback)  
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Reviewed by Eduardo F. Lopez, University of California, Los Angeles

In Antonia Darder and Rodolfo Torres' edited book, *Latinos and Education: A Critical Reader*, the authors seek to address and contextualize the historical, political, and economic factors that have shaped the schooling of Latina/o students since the publication of the first edition in 1997. Despite the growth of the Latina/o student population, the authors argue this community continues to experience persistent educational and economic inequality. In attempting to explain this inequality, mainstream analysis and public policy initiatives have been framed from deficit notions that simply blame the culture, parents, and communities of Latina/o students for their failure. Instead of using a victim blaming approach, Darder and Torres suggest that researchers need to develop a new language and theoretical frameworks that place Latina/o educational studies, "within the larger contexts of both the United States and the worldwide political economy" (pg. 11). Researchers developing this wider framework will need to understand the dialectical relationship of public schools within the economy and Latina/o communities. Schools have historically served to maintain and reproduce social class hierarchies and have been viewed by Latina/o communities as sites where they can attain social and economic mobility. By developing a critical understanding of the impact and influence of the political economy on the structure and practices of schools, researchers may begin to develop emancipatory pedagogies that challenge and transform these conditions.

These important concerns are critically engaged in a variety of ways by the excellent articles included in this collection. The volume is clearly divided into seven overarching themes: including History, Politics, and Education; Constructing Identities; Language and Schooling; Transforming Epistemologies; Emancipatory Pedagogies; Latino Immigrant Youth; and Community,

Resistance, and Activism. In each of the sections noted here, the authors have identified key readings that provide important examples of the critical scholarship that is emerging in the field. For example, in the first section, the readings illustrate how the process of “Americanization” and the needs of a capitalist economy influenced the experience of education for Latina/o students. The colonial legacy of this historical context remains deeply embedded in the curriculum and educational practices of today’s schools persist in their focus on deculturalization and the homogenizing students’ identities.

Darder and Torres are not interested in putting forth a simplistic or one-dimensional view of school reproduction, but rather seek to engage critically in ways that provide a more nuanced critical understanding of Latino education in the U.S. The authors carefully highlight the work of scholars who are involved in creating decolonizing epistemologies and culturally responsive pedagogies—pedagogies that honor and acknowledge the culture and language of Latina/o students. The last section of the collection ends with the stories and analysis of the counter-hegemonic work done by Latino parents and students who are actively working to challenge and transform oppressive conditions of schools in their communities.

While *Latinos and Education* focuses exclusively on public schools, researchers and educators interested in engaging concerns related to Latinos and Catholic education will find this volume of interest as well. In particular, scholars and practitioners seeking to better integrate the ideas of critical pedagogy, liberation theology, and Catholic social teaching will also find the text invaluable to their efforts. While each of these three theoretical lenses have particular debates and histories, in general they have common concerns and interests in examining the social and economic conditions of the poor, as well as the important role that researchers/practitioners plays in the struggle to challenge, oppose and transform inequalities within education and the larger society (Bradley-Levine & Carr, 2015 and Whipp & Scanlan, 2009). The Critical Pedagogical framework developed in *Latinos and Education* can effectively help to inform Latina/o Catholic education conversations through a wider historical, political, and economic lens. For example, in the public vs. Catholic school debate, public schools are often viewed as having failed to promote academic success in comparison to Catholic schools. Rather than simply blaming public schools, Catholic education researchers could bring greater complexity to the debate by using critical pedagogy to discuss, examine, and critique policies and practices within in public schools that perpetuate inequality within schools and society (i.e., No Child Left Behind, high stakes testing, and the school to prison pipeline).

Catholic schools, like public schools, are not neutral institutions. This is made apparent in Darder and Torres' introduction, which speaks to the history of the Southwest educational context and the frustration of Latino parents turning to Catholic schools in the hopes of finding better educational opportunities for their children. Other specific aspects related to Catholic Education are also found in several of the articles included in the volume. Martha Giménez makes this point in her analysis of religion, culture, and education; as does Luis Urrieta in his reference to negative portrayals of Latino children within Catholic schools, which often served to perpetuate homogenization, stereotypes, and deculturalization, through a pedagogical process of assimilation. These unfortunate examples are also reminiscent of George Sanchez's (1993) seminal work, *Becoming Mexican American* that illustrated how the Church used Americanization programs in Catholic schools during the early 1900's to promote the political and economic interests of the dominant culture and class.

Given the hegemonic role of traditional schooling, neither public schools nor Catholic schools have been able to effectively address the larger historical and persistent inequalities faced by Latina/o communities, despite some useful efforts in both arenas. The scholarship in *Latinos and Education*, thus, represents the type of critical research that is direly needed to better understand different facets of those conditions faced by Latina and Latino students and to move more effectively toward transforming both Catholic and public schools into educational environments of genuine empowerment and liberation for Latino communities.

### References

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