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Hispanic Teachers and Leaders in Catholic Schools: Special Issue Introduction

Melodie Wyttenbach¹ and Hosffman Ospino¹

We release this special issue on the heels of a National Summit on Hispanic Teachers and Leaders in Catholic Schools held at Boston College on October 2–4, 2022. The summit brought together various stakeholders from across the United States dedicated to the advancement of Catholic education to discuss the results of the report *Cultivating Talent: National Study Examining Pathways to Increase the Presence of Hispanic Teachers and Leaders in Catholic Schools* (a.k.a. *Cultivating Talent*¹) (Ospino & Wyttenbach, 2022). These various voices gathered at the summit explored ways to expand the conversation about what Catholic schools are doing and could do better to support Hispanic teachers and leaders, highlighting related research and signaling further areas of research as presented here in this special issue.

Within the rich tapestry of cultural, racial and linguistic families that constitute the U.S. Catholic experience in the twenty-first century, Hispanics constitute one of the largest groups, defining and redefining the Catholic experience in this country at all levels (Zech et al., 2017). We cannot ignore that about half of all Catholics in the United States are Hispanic, and represent the majority of Catholics under the age of 18 (Gray, 2014). One can only anticipate that more Hispanic children and youth will enroll in Catholic schools, and more Hispanic teachers and leaders will commit their wisdom and energy to serving in these institutions, just like Catholics from previous eras did. Efforts such as *Cultivating Talent*, the national summit, and this special issue are invitations to develop strategies to support the presence, work and contributions of Hispanic teachers and leaders more intentionally in our Catholic schools.

¹ The editors have chosen to use italics when referencing this report throughout the issue for stylistic preference and consistency.

¹ Boston College

The *Cultivating Talent* report, whose findings we summarized in the lead paper in this issue, reveals clearly that Catholic schools in the U.S. are, and will be, further enriched by the presence and contributions of Hispanic teachers and leaders. Recognizing the need to expand the research in several areas that the report addresses, we invited several contributing authors known for their high-quality work to contribute to this special issue. We also made an open call to scholars interested in submitting papers aligned with the central theme being examined: How can Catholic schools renew their commitment to invest in and cultivate talent within the Hispanic community? As the face of Catholicism in the United States continues to change rapidly, this special issue challenges stakeholders committed to Catholic education to examine more deeply the formation, recruitment, retention, and promotion of Hispanic educators, particularly in the context of Catholic schools.

As co-editors, we invited a diverse set of academic papers, research-practitioner articles, and book reviews. After providing an overview of the *Cultivating Talent* report, you will find the academic paper contributions organized around three essential questions: What pipelines and pathways exist for Hispanic Catholic teachers and leaders; what is the vocational call of Hispanic educators and how does this vocation reconstitute one's identity; and finally, how are schools reshaped by the presence and gifts of Hispanic educators? To make the connection between research and praxis more explicit, we provide readers with three articles that examine practical ways of bringing research into practice in the "Education in Practice" section, and two book reviews which encourage readers to continue learning more about relevant topics related to Hispanic educators. Let us say more about these contributions.

Addressing the question of Hispanic educator pipelines and pathways into leadership, Drs. John Reyes, Melodie Wyttenbach, and Veronica Alonzo, drawing on the voices of the less than two percent of Hispanic superintendents at this time in history, examine the need for greater Hispanic leadership at the superintendency level in their paper "Practices, Perceptions, and Perspectives of Hispanic Catholic School Diocesan Leaders". In light of their experience advancing a professional development program to support both Latinx teachers and leaders, Dr. Katy Lichon, Ms. Angela Maria Villamizar, Ms. Itzul Moreno, and Ms. Kenna Arana contribute a paper on the Latino Educator and Administrator Development Program (LEAD) titled "Fortalecer Raíces y Formar Alas: Evaluating the Impact of a Formation Program Designed to Empower, Advance, and Retain Latinx Educators and Leaders in Catholic Schools."

Examining the question of vocational calling and identities of Hispanic educators in Catholic schools, Drs. Antonio Felix and John Beltramo define essential elements for equitable preparation of educators for the Catholic sector in their paper "Critical Transformation: A Conceptual Framework for Examining the Impact of UCCE Programs on Latinx Catholic School Teachers." Dr. Elena Sada and Ms. Katie Ward in their article "Rethinking the Hispanic Teacher Shortage: Dual

Language Schools as Identity-Affirming Organizations,” continue the reflection on the growing awareness among Hispanic educators, many of them bilingual, regarding the value they bring to Catholic schools. Finally, Dr. Melodie Wyttenbach, Ms. Anne-Marie Funk, and Ms. Marissa Browne’s paper “Immigrant Catholic School Teachers: Working Across Cultures, Opportunities and Perspectives” follows in which they analyze the impact that the growing number of immigrant teachers have upon the Catholic school system, highlighting the assets they bring and the challenges they face as they adapt to a new system of schooling from other countries.

Two articles address the third and last question: How are schools reshaped by the presence and gifts of Hispanic educators? Drs. Jorge Pena, John Reyes, and Michael O’Connor provide an overview of the Catholic School domain, identifying key issues of equity for Hispanic students in the article “Catholic Theological and Equity Framework to Champion Hispanic Representation in Catholic Schools.” In their paper “Strengthening and Sustaining Dual Language Education in Catholic Schools” Dr. Laura Hamman-Ortiz, Katy Lichon, Ms. Clare Roche, and Ms. Paty Hardy reflect on the value and promise of dual language Catholic schools and the leadership within these schools.

Three “Education in Practice” contributions provide readers with a practical application of the research: “Decolonization of Education: How Educators Can Aid Transcultural Acculturation to Advance Communities Committed to Social Justice” by Drs. Aradhana Mudambi and Elena Sada; “Cultivating the Talent of Educators for Learning and Belonging” by Dr. Molly McMahan and Ms. Theresa Pigelli-Proud; and “Dual Language Catholic Schools: Innovation and Equity—Considerations for Making the Transition to Dual Language” by Drs. Carrie Fuller and Elena Sada.

To conclude, two book reviews invite readers to further expand their understanding of the central themes addressed in this special issue. Dr. Aubrey Scheopner Torres reviews *Teacher Diversity and Student Success: Why Racial Representation Matters in the Classroom* by [Seth Gershenson, Michael J. Hansen and Constance A. Lindsay \(2021\)](#). Scheopner highlights the importance of this work to inform conversations about teacher diversity, particularly in educational contexts with large presence of Black and Latino students. Ms. Katie Ward reviews *Transformative Translanguaging Espacios: Latinx Students and their Teachers Rompiendo Fronteras sin Miedo* edited by [Maite T. Sánchez and Ofelia García \(2022\)](#). This book is an exploration of the “transformative power of incorporating translanguaging, the dynamic language practices of bi/multilingual communities, in the schooling of US Latinx children and youth,” as Ward (in this issue) writes, centering the experiences of Latinx students, especially in multilingual spaces.

Our research reported in *Cultivating Talent* and the articles in this special issue clearly confirm that Catholic schools in the United States are and will be further enriched by the presence and contributions of Hispanic teachers and leaders. As we plan for a stronger future for Catholic education in the United States, we must make a renewed commitment to invest and cultivate Hispanic educational talent. Now is the time.

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